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MURTHE RIVER CROSSING

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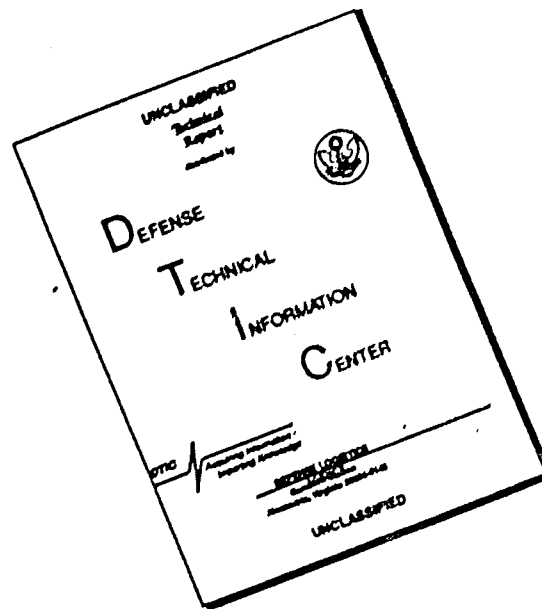
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MUERTHE RIVER CROSSING

Offensive, Deliberate Attack, River Crossing

Conducted by

Seventh Army
VI Corps
3rd Infantry

November 1944

Prepared by Section 19, Staff Group C

⁽¹⁰⁾
MAJ (P) Johnnie / Shepard, AV, Staff Group Leader

EPT (P), Tim / Casey, AV
MAJ Rick / Davila, MC
MAJ Bill / Jones, FA
MAJ John / Lockard, IN
MAJ Gary McGraw, TC
MAJ George McLouth, OD
MAJ Paul McNett, MI

MAJ Corky Milam, IN
MAJ Klaus Mullinex, AR
MAJ Glenn Porter, SC
MAJ Lana Speicher, AGC
MAJ Bob Sperberg, EN
MAJ Doug Streeter, FA

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COMMON REFERENCE: Meurthe River Crossing (November 1944)

TYPE OPERATION: Offensive, Deliberate Attack, River Crossing

OPPOSING FORCES: United States:

Seventh Army
VI Corps
3rd Infantry Division

German:

708th, 716th, 16th Divisions
360th Cossack

SYNOPSIS:

21
"Powerhouse I was the name given to the crossing of the Meurthe River in the Vosges of France on November 20, 1944. The commander of VI Corps, Major General Edward H. Brooks, ordered the 3rd Infantry Division to conduct a major assault crossing of the Meurthe between Claire fontaine and St. Michel. As objective training in river crossing operations progressed over five days, the artillery laid on harrassing fires with an effective cover plan. Clear weather also allowed XII TAC to provide close support. Against light opposition, the 3rd Infantry Division crossed the Meurthe on footbridges which were speedily installed by the Engineers. Construction of Bailey and treadway vehicle bridges soon followed.

The crossing of the Meurthe River by the 3rd Infantry Division was one of the most successful large-scale river crossing of World War II. Careful preparation, good plans, training, engineer and artillery support combined with weak enemy opposition to assure the success of "Powerhouse I" and the subsequent disintegration of the German Winter Line.

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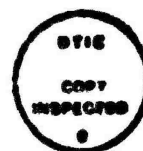
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MEURTHE RIVER CROSSING BATTLE BOOK

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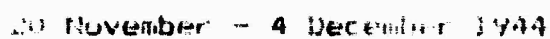


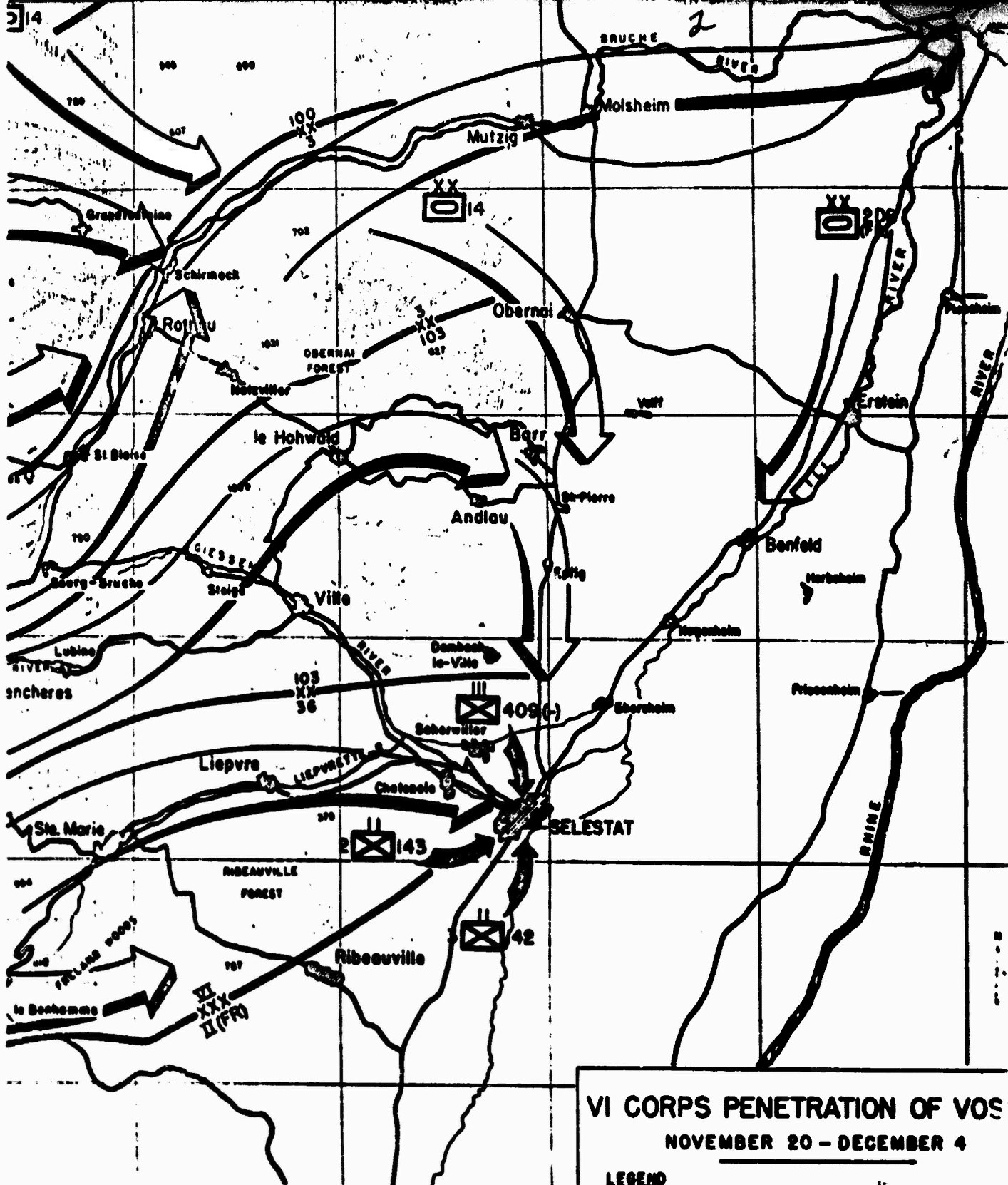
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THE MEURTHE RIVER CROSSING

I. BACKGROUND AND SOURCES

On 19 November 1944, VI US Corps reached the MEURTHE RIVER in position to execute a deliberate river crossing and drive to the VOSGES MOUNTAIN passes. Early on the morning of the 20th, the 3rd Infantry Division's 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments attacked through the 15th Infantry at ST. MICHEL and CLAIRE FONTAINE securing crossing sites on the flooded MEURTHE RIVER. The division's crossing met light resistance from elements of the German 716th Infantry Division occupying prepared positions on the east bank of the MEURTHE. [1]

Sources applied to analysis of the 3rd Infantry Division's MEURTHE RIVER crossing can be broadly categorized as doctrinal literature, operational directives and orders, and historical documents. Doctrinal literature available includes FM 100-3 Operations, FM 5-5 and 5-6 dealing with engineer organization and operation and notes on lessons learned produced by the European Theatre of Operations (ETO) Operations Division. In the area of operational directives and orders, the 7th Army Operations Directive and VI Corps Field Order (FO) No. 7 directing the operation are available.

In the area of histories, there are official histories, historical documents, narrative histories and historical analyses. Official histories available covering the action include the 7th Army, 3rd Division, 15th and 30th Infantry histories. Narrative histories available include interviews with German commanders within Army Group G and LXIV Corps during the period. Historical documents include U.S. and German operations logs and reports, the VI Corps After Action Report, and a German report on the preparation of VOSGES defenses. Historical analysis is contained in secondary sources such as unofficial military histories.

FM's 5-5 and 5-6 were published in 1941 and 1943 respectively and undoubtedly were available to units involved in the operation. FM 100-5 had just been published in June 1944, and it is questionable whether it was available in the ETO. This Ground Forces doctrinal literature was supplemented by ETO Operations Division's notes citing specific examples of lessons learned based on battle experience. These information bulletins were undoubtedly available to the commanders and staffs. By this time in the war, river crossing doctrine had been refined based on combat experience gained from our Allies and U.S. forces' experience in the Mediterranean Theatre. River crossing doctrine from an operations and engineering

perspective was well developed and readily available to the ETO commands.

At times during periods of rapid movement in the ETO, units would produce precise written operational documents after the fact vice prior to the action. Consequently, often operational directives tended to vindicate the battle action which may not have developed as originally planned. This was probably not the case with either the Seventh Army Directive or the VI Corps Field Order No. 7. Sixth Corps had adequate time to pull troops out of line, conduct rehearsals and specialized training in planned (deliberate) river crossing, while also conducting reconnaissance and deception operations. All of these actions were basically in accordance with F.O. 7. Certain elements contained in the field order could not be executed as planned; however, these may be attributed to changes in the operational environment.

The official histories concerning the action must be applied carefully in view of the natural tendency toward bias. They are largely consistent. They vary in scope and associated detail. Care must be taken because there is a tendency in the official histories once an error has been published to continue that error throughout. This reflects a failure to return to primary source material. The primary

documents available to validate the official histories of this battle are the historical documents, particularly the VI Corps operational log (journals), and the VI Corps After Action Report on the battle. While one cannot totally discount bias, these documents were produced contemporary to the events in response to specific military requirements and would be less subject to intentional bias. They are particularly useful when considered in association with the limited German documents and narrative histories derived from the senior German officers involved. Perhaps of greater significance is the fact that this battle was considered successful and consequently there was no motivation to bias the histories to vindicate or villify any commanders or units. While the sources are not as complete as desired, they are sufficient for the purpose of this analysis and provide adequate depth for validation of sources.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Seventh United States Army Report of Operations, France and Germany, 1944-1945, Vol. II, (Heidelberg: Aloys Graf, 1946), pp. 423 - 429.

II. REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC SETTING

Following the invasion of NORMANDY in June 1944, Allied armies began the long arduous fight across Western Europe aimed at defeating the Nazi regime and liberating Europe from Hitler's oppression. The Allies made impressive gains in the months that followed: Paris was liberated 25 August, Brussels was freed 3 September, and the first Allied soldiers set foot on German soil 11 September 1944.

By October and November 1944, the German Army was stoutly defending along the entire Western Front. The Allied plan called for a push to the RHINE and occupation of the west bank before any large penetration beyond the RHINE would be attempted. [1] The plan called for the First Canadian Army and Second British Army to press the attack in the north to eliminate enemy defenses south of MAAS. The First and Ninth U.S. Armies continued fighting east of AACHEN in the ESCHWEILER and HURTGEN FOREST area. Further south, other Allied Armies were steadily advancing toward the RHINE. The Third U.S. Army took METZ on 22 November.

On the southern flank of the Allied effort, the Seventh U.S. Army had fought its way up from its landing site in

southern France into the VOSGES MOUNTAINS in eastern France. The Seventh U.S. Army reached the RHINE on 23 November with the capture of STRASBOURG while the First French Army broke through the BELFORT GAP and reached the river on 20 November. The MEURTHE RIVER crossing was part of the Seventh Army's drive through the VOSGES to secure a bridgehead on the RHINE in order to begin the destruction of enemy ground forces east of the RHINE.

Germany's strategy in the West in the fall of 1944 was to hold the entire front while a counterattack through the ARDENNES was planned, an initiative created by Hitler although erroneously credited to Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt, commander of all German forces on the Western Front. The plan was to commit two panzer armies in a push to ANTWERP and BRUSSELS in an attempt to "cut off the British Army" from its bases of supply, to force it to evacuate the continent. [2] Hitler believed that if he could create a second Dunkirk, then Britain would be forced to drop out of the war. This would give him time to shore up his defenses against the Russians and create a stalemate in the East. [3]

Any comparison between the Allies and the Axis powers reveals that they were diametrically opposed to each other.

Even though the Soviets adopted a communist system, they were forced to join with the Western Allies to fight the life-threatening nemesis of the Nazi regime.

The blatant acts of aggression on the part of Germany, Italy and Japan galvanized the rest of the world against them. Hitler attempted to replace the traditional values of western Europe and its Christian heritage with the myth of the Master Race and Aryan supremacy. In the Wehrmacht, every officer and soldier swore an allegiance not to Germany, but to Adolf Hitler. He was able to build a personality cult which enabled him to exhort the German nation to continue fighting when it was obvious even to Hitler that the war was lost.

By November 1944, Hitler's Reich was shrinking daily as the Allies attacked from east and west. Years of wartime economic mobilization and sacrifice by the German people had begun to reduce their will to fight despite exhortation from Berlin. The growing losses from the Russian front and the Allied invasion of France marked the beginning of the end of Hitler's 1000-year Reich.

Politically, Hitler was still firmly in control despite an assassination attempt against him in July 1944. Despite the abortive attack on his life, Hitler's resolve to defeat

the Allies had not been shaken. He continually spoke of the "miracle weapons" which would bring the Allies to their knees. While von Rundstedt desperately pulled together the remnants of the retreating German forces in the West and instilled the will to resist in the new and scarcely trained replacement units, Hitler began to withdraw into a world lacking reality. He became more involved in the day-to-day operations of the war, trusting the military less and less since the 20 July assassination attempt. [4]

By the winter of 1944, national objectives and vital interests on both sides were clear. As previously mentioned, the Allies agreed early in the war to defeat Germany first and then turn to Japan. It was in the vital interest of the coalition to follow this strategy in order to take the pressure off the Soviet Union by opening a second front against Germany as expeditiously as possible.

On the German side, Hitler had issued orders to "hold to the last man" and "defend to the last." Following the war, leading German generals lamented over their lack of flexibility to conduct coordinated delaying actions and withdrawals as they saw fit. Certainly Germany could have saved the lives of many of its own troops, but in the end they

would have only forestalled the inevitable. By the fall of 1944, no amount of tactical or operational brilliance could compensate for the overwhelming superiority in men and materiel possessed by the Allies.

Hitler refused to believe the intelligence which detailed the Allies superiority over his own dwindling forces. He was convinced that the ARDENNES offensive would be decisive in eliminating Britain from the war. When the offensive failed, it was only a matter of time before the entire Fortress Europe crumbled.

As the Allied forces increased in fighting strength and logistical support, Germany was forced to scrape lower and lower into its manpower barrel. Old men in their seventies and boys no older than 14 or 15 were conscripted into service. Ill-trained and poorly armed, they were sent to the Front; the lucky ones were quickly taken prisoner.

Not only manpower was drying up. The constant bombing had destroyed much of Germany's industrial base. Equipment being produced often fell victim to resistance organizations in France or to Allied bombers. What little equipment that was able to reach the Front often went to the elite Waffen-SS units. Because of their training, leadership and esprit,

these units often fought tenaciously and literally, "to the last man".

The antagonists had fought each other in the First World War which resulted ultimately in Germany's defeat and the downfall of the Hohenzollern dynasty. Following WWI, the Americans and their Allies extracted heavy indemnity payments from Germany. In addition, Germany was forced to give up large portions of its industrial region and the much fought-over region of Alsace-Lorraine once more returned to France. Perhaps most damaging, in the eyes of the German people, was the clause in the Treaty of Versailles in which Germany was forced to admit responsibility for starting WWI. The treaty helped create political and economic conditions in post-war Germany which gave rise to Adolf Hitler in the late 1920's and early 1930's.

Following WWI, the Americans demobilized, celebrated their victory over Germany, and returned to the isolationist period once more. Once again the United States believed it was protected from foreign war by the two oceans which isolated it from Europe and Asia.

During WWII, both nations supported their country's war

aims. Germany saw in the Nazi Party an opportunity to regain its honor following its humiliating defeat in the last war. Hitler improved economic and social conditions in Germany, rearmed and once again made Germany a world power, and vowed that the German Reich would last for a thousand years.

The American people fully backed the aims of their government as well. Following the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the United States officially entered the war against the Axis powers. Roosevelt was already providing all the help he could to Great Britain in its struggle against the Axis. One of the first major decisions upon which the Allies agreed was that Germany must be defeated before Japan. The "Germany First" decision became the cornerstone of Allied strategy until the defeat of Nazi Germany.

In past wars both armies had been well led and well trained. American troops were ill-prepared initially upon their entry into WWI but gained experience rapidly and received assistance in materiel and training from both Great Britain and France. Germany had been in the war since 1914 and had a battle hardened armed force by the time the Doughboys landed in France in 1917.

Both armies had used sound doctrines in previous wars. Germany, under Prussian leadership, had fought a series of wars for unification during the 19th Century and had developed the best staff system in Europe. Under von Moltke the elder, the railway system had been incorporated into strategic planning and mobilization to a higher degree in Germany than in any other nation in Europe. This allowed Germany to fight a two-front war until the overwhelming might of the United States, in alliance with its Allies, brought about its defeat in 1918.

In summary, the MEURTHE RIVER crossing was part of the extremely successful Allied campaign in France. At the conclusion of this campaign the Germans had lost enormous numbers of men and even greater amounts of materiel. By autumn 1944, the Germans were retreating on every front and fighting on their own soil for the first time. It would only be a matter of time before the once invincible war machine would grind to a halt through the absolute defeat and destruction of Nazi Germany.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Seventh United States Army in France and Germany 1944-1945, Vol. II, (Heidelberg: Aloys Graf, 1946), p. 422.
- 2 Liddell B. H. Hart. The German Generals Talk. (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1948), p. 275.
- 3 Ibid., p. 275.
- 4 James M. Stokesbury. A Short History of World War II (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1980), p. 319.

III. THE TACTICAL SITUATION

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

The weather for this operational period was normal for eastern France in November. It was cold and damp with temperatures ranging from the low 30's into the 50's. The ground had been soaked by almost continuous rain from the end of October, and this had swollen the rivers and made cross country mobility poor. Visibility was, however, fair to good except during periods of heavy rain. Air operations and artillery fires, although somewhat degraded, were normally effective.

The weather in the operational area on 19-20 November 1944 was as follows: 19 November: Skies were partly cloudy with periods of rain beginning about 2100 hours. Visibility at dawn was 5 miles with scattered clouds and the temperature ranged from a high of 50 degrees in the daytime to a low of 35 degrees at night.; 20 November: There was a light rain in the morning which ended around noon. Visibility was down to 2-3 miles and cloud cover was continuous. The temperature ranged from 45 degrees in the daytime to 30 degrees at night. [1]

The bad weather had a significant impact on the personnel

of both the 3RD Infantry Division and the German forces. According to operational records, the 3RD ID troops complained bitterly about the weather until they were issued overcoats. The Division also experienced over 448 cases of trenchfoot and 241 upper-respiratory ailments requiring hospitalization during the month of November 1944. The Division surgeon commenting on these injuries stated, "Initial operations from the mountains brought about a sharp rise in such conditions as trenchfoot, but greater freedom of movement and improved sanitary conditions late in the month reduced admissions from these causes to a negligible figure." [2] The poor weather also contributed significantly to a degradation of the enemy's already poor morale.

On 19-20 November, the MEURTHE RIVER was swollen from a normal width of 60 to 100 feet to a width of up to 350 feet in places. Its depth at this time was 5-6 feet, which was 2-3 feet above normal, and the current was very swift. The numerous streams feeding the MEURTHE were also running higher and faster than normal.

The low ground in the Area of Operations was mostly farm land, and the soil had been saturated by the continuous rains. The soil of the forested hills was also softened by the rain,

and the continuous wet weather tended to significantly reduce visibility in the heavily forested areas, especially in the early morning hours.

The wet weather restricted supply traffic to the existing roads and bridges. This meant that virtually everything in the 3RD Division AO up to the MEURTHE was moved along the LASALLE-NOMPATELIZE highway running generally in the center of the Division's sector. Because of the poor trafficability, packboards were distributed by Corps, and a Quartermaster Pack(mule) Train Company was made available if needed. [3]

The weather had little effect on visual or photographic reconnaissance for this operation. Although there were periods of substantial overcast, there was enough clear weather to provide current aerial photos and reports on enemy strengths and dispositions. The weather also did little to hamper heavy patrolling by the units holding the line prior to the operation.

The bad weather actually assisted the 3rd Division's night movement to the line of departure because the rain and the soft ground masked the engineer bridging efforts and the movements of the lead battalions across the river. It also masked the deployment of the supporting weapons west of the

MEURTHE on the night of the 19th.

The rain swollen rivers necessitated extra bridging equipment and longer emplacement times for the bridges. It also forced the engineers to anchor their floating bridges to the pilings of destroyed permanent bridges to keep them from being swept away in the swift current. Vehicular fording and wading was also impossible because of the high water.

The weather and the soft, rain-soaked ground made movement off the roads almost impossible. This relegated tanks and other supporting weapons to a rather static or reserve role. Additionally, both maneuver units and supply columns were relegated to the use of one road up to the river. This made resupply difficult and time consuming, especially for artillery and mortar units.

The smoke pots used on the morning of the 20th were ineffective because they could not be properly sited and because shifting winds dispersed their smoke. It was only the fire of the 4.2 inch mortars which finally established a smoke screen on the day of the 20th. A combination of smoke generators and smoke pots produced a satisfactory cover on the 21st. [4] The high humidity also probably helped to keep the

smoke low to the ground.

The weather had little direct effect on communications or command and control. The terrain's compartmented nature made radios hard to use, and wire was the primary means of communication. The wet ground made wire laying and repair very difficult.

TERRAIN

The 3rd Infantry Division's area of operations for the MEURTHE River crossing contains a 7 kilometer wide cultivated plain west of the river between the towns of HERBAVILLE and CLAIRE FONTAINE. This flat area is surrounded on all sides by the heavily wooded VOSGES MOUNTAINS, which rise in spots over 500 meters above the plain to a total height of up to 900 meters. The MEURTHE River runs north to south, splitting the Division's zone and provided the major natural obstacle in the area. During the period 19-20 November 1944, the MEURTHE River and its many tributaries were swollen due to heavy fall rains. The major roads in sector were the east-west route from RAMBERVILLERS to ST. DIE, and the road into the VOSGES MOUNTAINS east of the MEURTHE from LA HOLLANDE to SAALES.

There were no major built up areas in the 3rd Division's sector. Most built up areas were small farming towns which offered some cover but presented no significant urban warfare problems. The major towns in the sector for the operation on 19-20 November 1944 were NOMPATELIZE, LA VOIVRE, LA HOLLANDE and CLAIREFONTAINE.

Observation and Fire - "Observation was severely limited due to extensive forests." [5] Also, "fields of fire were extremely limited." [6] The low open cultivated area west of the MEURTHE provided observation up to 3 kilometers in spots from ground level. The entire area from the MEURTHE RIVER to NOMPATELIZE could be observed from the high ground east of the river southwest of the town of LA VOIVRE. "This area, however, was undulating and though seemingly exposed to observation from the high ground on the east side of the river, did in fact afford considerable cover for Infantry troops, though very little in the way of flash defilade for artillery or concealed concentration areas for engineer equipment or transportation." [7]

The effects of direct fire weapons, even in the open areas, were limited by the undulating terrain, and most significant engagements occurred at ranges of less than 500 yards. Though direct fire was limited, indirect fire weapons

and air support could be directed with good effect against targets in the open. Their effect in the predominately wooded terrain was limited.

Because of the exposed nature of the cultivated areas west of the MEURTHE, the 3rd Division chose to conduct its initial river crossings after dark on the 19th of November. Daylight crossing on the following days demanded the use of smoke to cover the crossing sites until the enemy had been pushed from observation points overlooking the river. The low flat areas in the vicinity of the river allowed for direct fire weapons support from the west bank for the 3rd Division's lead units.

Cover and Concealment - "The terrain afforded excellent cover for troops and vehicles. About 75% of the area was under forest." [8] This statement is true for the forested hills, but as was mentioned above, did not hold true for vehicle concentrations and artillery positions in the open areas. The 3rd Division had good cover and concealment for its movement to the open area which started about 5 kilometers west of the MEURTHE around the village of LA SALLE. The Division had good covered and concealed terrain to within 1 kilometer of the MEURTHE in the high ground northwest of ST.

DIE. Because of its position along the forested area west of the river, LA SALLE was made the Division's detrucking point, and the assault elements moved to the river on foot after dark on the night of 19 November.

The heavily forested high ground east of the river offered the enemy well concealed observation points. The towns and wooded areas along the MEURTHE afforded concealment and some cover for small enemy units. The lack of any really good cover along the enemy's side of the river probably contributed to the relative ease by which his defenses were breeched by the 3rd Division. It also probably led the Division G2 to make the assumption that the enemy would use the MEURTHE River line merely as a delay position and not as his main defensive line. [9]

Obstacles - The major obstacles in the 3rd Division's zone were : (1) the MEURTHE River, which runs north to south across the sector. It was at flood stage on 19-20 November 1944. Although the river had a gravel bottom, it was unfordable by both vehicles and troops because of its depth and swift current. (2) the marshy river banks, which restricted the vehicular approaches to the river to the few good roads in the area and necessitated the placing of assault bridges at the sites of the former permanent bridges, which

were blown by the enemy. (3) the wet ground and cultivated fields in the low areas and the heavy forestation on the high ground, which restricted vehicular movement to the existing hard surface roads. Because of these obstacles, VI Corps was required to develop detailed traffic and supply control plans. [10] These obstacles also limited the use of armored support to the existing roads or in a static direct fire support role.

The VOSGES MOUNTAINS presented a significant obstacle to movement. The few good roads and the thickly forested defensible terrain necessitated dismounted operations and restricted both resupply and evacuation. They also channeled the Division's effort through the open areas and along the roads, denying the commander much flexibility in his scheme of maneuver and compounding command and control problems. All of these obstacles benefitted the defender more than they did the 3rd Division. These obstacles should have restricted German resupply, evacuation and reinforcement capabilities.

Key Terrain - There were two types of key terrain which influenced this operation and were critical to its success. The first was the former bridge sites along the MEURTHE RIVER. Because of the MEURTHE's high water, swift current and limited approaches, the destroyed bridge sites became key to the

division's operation. The Division focused its assault and engineer efforts on securing these sites so that vehicular bridges could be anchored to the still-standing bridge foundations. Because there were only a limited number of bridging sites in sector, the German defenders were able to easily register their artillery on them. They did inflict some casualties on the 3rd Division during crossing operations; however, these casualties resulted more from routine harrassing fire than from deliberate concentrations. The lead elements of the Division were able to cross virtually undetected or losses would have been much higher. The bridge sites were located in the vicinity of the built up areas of LA VOIVRE, CLAIREFONTAINE and LA HOLLANDE. These are also the areas where the Germans had placed their major defensive positions. The second important terrain features were the town of SAALES and the SAALES PASS. The securing of the communications center of SAALES and the approaches leading to it were key to the success of the 3rd Infantry Division's post-river crossing operations. The town of SAALES controlled the major roads leading east towards STRASBOURG and the RHINE RIVER. Because of its importance, this town was made a key objective of the Division and forced the 3rd to orient toward the LA HOLLANDE - HURBACHE - SAALES ROAD. Because the German^s also recognized the importance of SAALES, they sited their defenses to protect the approaches leading into the

VOSGES and toward the town.

AVENUES OF APPROACH

There was really only one avenue of approach for the 3rd Division's attack on the MEURTHE River. This was the 7 kilometer wide low area running west of the MEURTHE to LA SALLE. This avenue was split at NOMPATELIZE into 2 regimental avenues of approach, one running from NOMPATELIZE to LA VOIVRE via BIARVILLE and ST. MICHEL and the other running north from NOMPATELIZE toward CLAIREFONTAINE via DEFOSSE. These avenues were wide enough to allow easy movement by dismounted troops but lacked sufficient good roads to adequately handle the vehicular traffic which followed the Division's lead elements. The avenue did provide adequate maneuver space for the attack, and it helped to focus the Division's efforts toward the best crossing sites and the LA HOLLANDE - HURBACHE road leading into the VOSGES. Because the avenue failed to provide adequate concealment from enemy observation and lacked cover for vehicular concentrations and artillery units, it was necessary to conduct the initial stages of this operation at night. The enemy in sector was positioned to defend the MEURTHE and deny access to the VOSGES. This, however, put them at the widest part of the avenue and allowed sufficient

maneuver room for the 3rd to attack on a wide front and flank pockets of resistance.

COMPARISON OF OPPOSING FORCES

United States Forces - the 3rd Infantry Division.

November found the U.S. forces continuing their eastward drive against a stubbornly resisting enemy. VI Corps was making penetrations deep into the difficult, wooded, terrain of the VOSGES MOUNTAINS. As the corps approached the MEURTHE RIVER in mid-November, efforts began for the assault crossing of the swollen river. The VI Corps at this stage was composed of primarily the 3rd, 36th, 100th and 103rd Infantry Divisions. The 100th Infantry Division had shifted its weight from the west side of the river to the north into the BACJARAT bridgehead and commenced an attack south and parallel to the east bank. This attack, though hampered by very difficult terrain and weather conditions, initially made good progress. Meanwhile, the 103rd Infantry Division completed its relief of elements of the 3rd Infantry Division along the MEURTHE RIVER and assumed command of its zone by 12 November. The 103rd immediately began preparation for its limited objective attacks to seize the high ground southwest of ST.DIE. The relieved elements of the 3rd Infantry Division withdrew to training areas west of the MEURTHE RIVER. There they commenced intensive training under conditions which would

approximate those of the actual river crossing. [11] The general VI Corps dispositions and concept for the continuation of the attack through the VOSGES are shown on Map 1.

Lesson

As the evidence of the evidence 1949

At this point, the VI Corps front along the MEURTHE RIVER extended from BACCARAT in the north to GERARDMER in the south, a distance of approximately 30 miles. The VI Corps formed the Seventh Army's right flank, bordered on the north by the XV (US) Corps and the south by the II French Corps of the First French Army. The complete troop list for the VI Corps for the MEURTHE RIVER crossing operation is shown at TABLE 1. The Third Infantry Division which made the main corps attack will be the focus of the remainder of this study.

In mid-November, the 3rd Infantry Division consisted of three infantry regiments (the 7th, 15th, and 30th) and was augmented by the attachment of the 93rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 756th Tank Battalion, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, and elements of the 3rd Chemical Battalion. [12] The complete Division Troop List for POWERHOUSE 1 is shown at TABLE 2.

HEADQUARTERS VI CORPS
APO 48

By Authority of
CO VI CORPS
Initials
19 Nov 48

VI CORPS COMBAT TROOP LIST

191200A Nov 44

Hq & Hq Co VI Corps

3d Inf Div

7th Inf - 10th FA Bn (105mm How)
15th Inf - 39th FA Bn (105mm How)
30th Inf - 41st FA Bn (105mm How)
9th FA Bn (155mm How)
10th Engr C Bn
Atchd:
93d Armd FA Bn (105mm How SP)
756th Tr Bn (-Co B) (75 and 76mm Guns)
671st TD Bn (-Co C) (3" Gun SP)
3d Cnl Pn (Mts) (-Cos B, C) (4.2" Mort)

35th Inf Div

141st Inf - 131st FA Bn (105mm How)
142d Inf - 132d FA Bn (105mm How)
144th Inf - 133d FA Bn (105mm How)
155th FA Bn (155mm How)
111th Engr C Bn
Atchd:
753d Tr Bn (-Co A, 1 Plat Co D)
(75 and 76mm Guns)
686th TD Bn (-Co B, 1 Plat Recon Co)
(3" Gun SP)
Co D 83d Cnl Pn (4.2" Mort)

100th Inf Div

397th Inf - 374th FA Bn (105mm How)
398th Inf - 375th FA Bn (105mm How)
399th Inf - 376th FA Bn (105mm How)
374th FA Bn (155mm How)
375th Engr C Bn
Atchd:
69th Armd FA Bn (105mm How SP)
117th Cav Recon Sq
Co A, 1st Co D 753d Tr Bn
(75 and 76mm Guns)
Co B, 1st Recon Co 636th TD Bn
(3" Gun SP)
83d Cnl Pn (-Cos B, C) (4.2" Mort)

107d Inf Div

407th Inf - 387d FA Bn (105mm How)
410th Inf - 388d FA Bn (105mm How)
411th Inf - 389th FA Bn (105mm How)
387th FA Bn (155mm How)
389th Engr C Bn
Atchd:
Co A 756th Tr Bn (75 and 76mm Guns)
Co C 671st TD Bn (3" Gun SP)
Cos B, D 3d Cnl Pn (4.2" Mort)

Atchd on arrival

VI CORPS

Atchd:

CCA 14th Armd Div

25th Tr Bn (75 and 76mm Guns)
48th Tr Bn (75 and 76mm Guns)
62d Armd Inf Bn
500th Armd FA Bn (105mm How SP)
Tr B 94th Cav Recon Sq (recon)
Co C 125th Armd Engr Bn

Hq & Hq Btry VI Corps Arty

2d FA Bn
Hq & Hq Btry 35th FA Gp
958th FA Bn (8" How)
194th FA Bn (8" How)
Hq & Hq Btry 6th FA Gp
36th FA Bn (155mm Gun)
634th FA Bn (155mm How)
141st FA Bn (155mm How)
Hq & Hq Btry 17th FA Gp
977th FA Bn (155mm Gun)
Hq & Hq Btry 405th FA Gp
935th FA Bn (4.5" Gun)
938th FA Bn (155mm How)

Hq & Hq Btry & AAA 35th AAA Bn

Hq & Hq Btry 91st AAA Gp
62d AAA Gun Bn (90mm Gun)
72d AAA Gun Bn (90mm Gun)
216th AAA Gun Bn (90mm Gun)
439th AAA AV Bn (40mm Gun)
833d AAA AV Bn (-Stripes C, D) (40mm Gun)
Hq & Hq Btry 5th AAA Gp
421st AAA AV Bn (40mm Gun)
441st AAA AV Bn (37mm Gun SP) (Supporting 3d Inf Div)
442d AAA AV Bn (37mm Gun SP) (Supporting 36th Inf Div)
834th AAA AV Bn (40mm Gun) (Supporting 103d Inf Div)
898th AAA AV Bn (40mm Gun) (Supporting 100th Inf Div)

Hq & Hq Co 1st Armd Gp

Engr
36th Engr C Regt
40th Engr C Bn

Sig
87th Sig Bn
72d Sig Co (Spec)

701st Tr Bn (75 and 76mm Guns)
724th TD Bn (3" Gun Towed)

VI Corps Units Atchd to VI Corps
Co B 83d Cnl Pn (4.2" Mort)

UNCLASSIFIED

3RD INFANTRY DIVISION

7th Infantry Regiment
 15th Infantry Regiment
 30th Infantry Regiment
 DIVARTY

9th FA Bn
 10th FA Bn
 39th FA Bn
 41st FA Bn

10th Engineer Bn
 3rd Medical Bn
 3rd Recon Troop

Division HQ Spt Troops

Div HQ
 HQ Co
 MP Plt
 3rd Signal Co
 3rd QM Co
 703rd Ord Co
 Div Band

ATTACHMENTS:

93rd Armd FA Bn
 756th Tank Bn (-B Co)
 601st Tank Dest Bn (-C Co)
 3rd Chemical Bn (Motorized) (-B, C Co)
 441st AAA Bn

TABLE 2 - 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION TROOP LIST FOR POWERHOUSE I
 19 November 1944

The 3rd Infantry Division was a veteran of the ANZIO Campaign and the long march across southern France. It had essentially been in continuous tough combat since August 1944. Late October and early November found the Division pushing against an enemy still capable of strong but limited defensive actions. Attacks against LE HAUT JACQUES and LASALLE had been bitterly contested. In addition to strong infantry actions, the enemy was particularly strong in his use of artillery mortars and well placed machine guns, and he used his ammunition for these weapons liberally. As a result of these experiences in France in the summer of 1944, the 3rd Infantry Division approached its planning of the MEURTHE RIVER crossing with a determined and serious outlook of a battle scarred unit attacking an equally determined and capable enemy.

As the 3rd Division was in the process of undergoing its aforementioned relief by the 103rd Division of its center and right regiments (7th and 30th), the 15th Infantry Regiment was carrying out an operation to the northeast to clear the enemy from the west bank of the MEURTHE RIVER as far north as CLAIREFONTAINE. With the 7th and 30th Regiments in their training areas for the MEURTHE crossing, the 15th Regiment was ordered to hold the west bank of the MEURTHE, to cover all preparations incident to the river crossing, and after the

assault, assemble as division reserve and follow the crossing echelons. The 15th Regiment's great hero, Audie Murphy, had been severely injured in August and was hospitalized during the MEURTHE crossing. He was not to return to the Division until December.

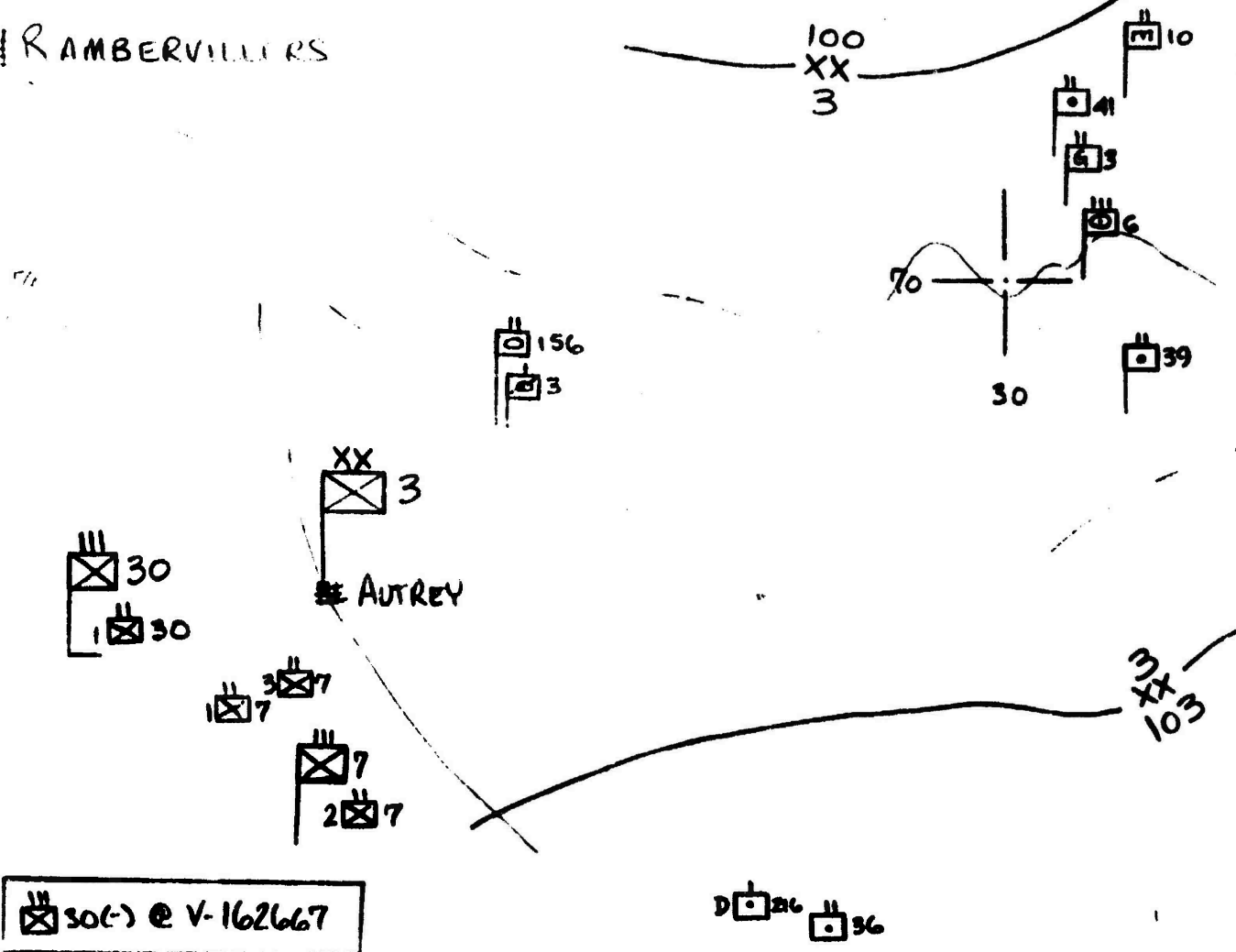
In preparation for the assault, the Division was deployed as shown on the situation overlay Figure 1. The 7th Regiment was in training areas near BIARVILLE. Its three battalions used the preparation period to enjoy some rest and then began intensive training on day/night river crossing operations, small unit tactics, rifle platoon and companies in the attack and the integration of crew served weapons in the operation. Special training in map reading, radio-telephone procedures and direction of artillery fires by forward observers was also conducted. The regiment also conducted its officer and NCO school training. [13]

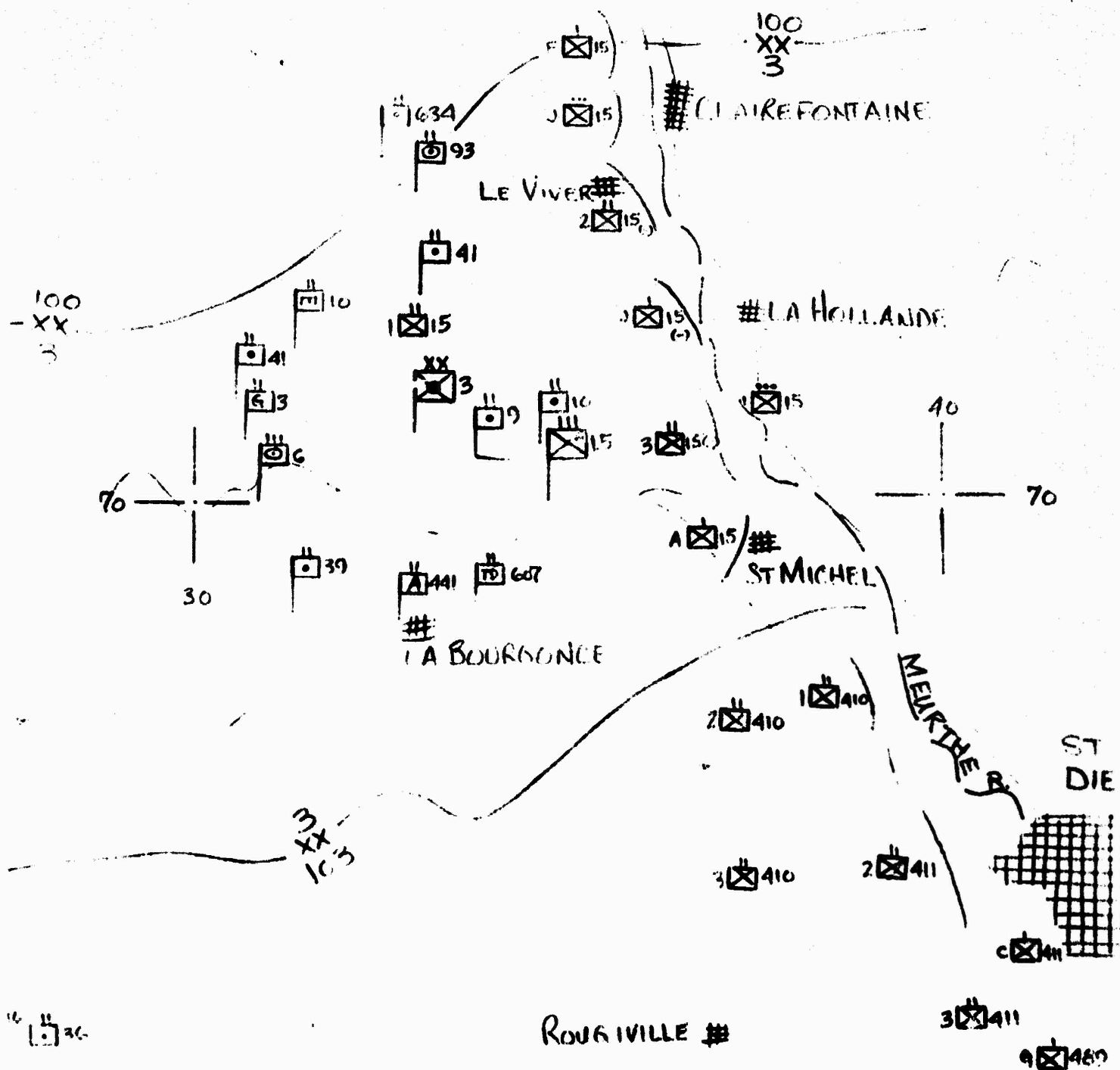
20

30

OVERLAY TO G-3 REPORT #104
 HQ 1st INF DIV; 19 NOV 1944
 MAP 1/50,000 FR. XXXV-17, XXXVI-17

RAMBERVILLERS





2

FIGURE 1 - SITUATION OVERLAY. DISPOSITION OF THE 3RD INFANTRY
DIVISION AT START OF POWERHOUSE I,
19 November 1944

Meanwhile, the 30th Infantry Regiment was assembled in training areas south of RAMBERVILLES, with its 1st Battalion, Regimental Headquarters, and special units in and near ST. HELENE, and the 2nd and 3rd Battalions in BULT. The 30th Regiment was enjoying its first rest period since landing in France at CAVALLAIRE SUR-MER on 15 August. After two days of rest, the 30th also began an intensive period of training despite the cold, wet weather. Training for the MEURTHE RIVER crossing was conducted both day and night on the MORTAGNE RIVER. Other training conducted included small unit problems, reduction of pillboxes and fortified houses, and attack through forests. In addition, the "Regimental Raiders" and the Regimental I & R Platoon reconnoitered the actual river crossing sites and assisted in preparations for the MEURTHE operation. [14]

The 3rd Infantry Division, by virtue of the extended preparation time prior to its assault on the MEURTHE RIVER, was able to bring its units to nearly full strength. The Division welcomed nearly 3500 replacements into its veteran units to preserve a professional fighting edge in the VI Corps. Tables 3 and 4 provide a summary of 3rd Division casualties and replacements during this period. By comparison, the Division inflicted an estimated 3638 enemy casualties (12 officers and 307 EM killed, 6 officers and 181

EM wounded, 69 officers and 3063 EM captured). [15]. These casualties represented a severe decrement on the enemy's capability to resist.

CUMULATIVE CASUALTY REPORT

UNIT	BATTLE CASUALTY				TTL BC	NON BATTLE CASUALTY				TTL NBC	GRAND TTL
	KIA	WIA	MIA	IIA		DEATHS	DIS	EXH'N	INJ		
7th Inf	137	617	-	12	786	-	286	25	121	432	1218
15th Inf	136	354	65	52	607	-	462	52	286	800	1407
30th Inf	143	307	13	27	490	-	343	31	330	704	1194
DIVARTY	-	2	-	1	3	-	2	-	-	2	5
9th FA	-	2	-	-	2	-	5	-	4	9	11
10th FA	4	9	-	-	13	-	3	-	2	5	18
39th FA	3	1	1	-	5	-	9	-	1	10	15
41st FA	2	5	-	-	7	-	8	-	1	9	16
10 Engr	6	15	-	2	23	-	26	4	2	32	55
3rd Med	1	1	2	-	4	4	22	-	2	24	28
Div HQ	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	2	5	5
3rd Rcn Trp	5	15	1	1	22	-	25	-	2	27	49
HQ Spt Trp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HQ Co	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	-	6	21	21
MP Plt	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1
3rd Sig Plt	2	-	-	-	2	-	9	-	2	11	13
3rd QM Plt	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	2	6	6
703rd Ord Co	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	7	7
Div Band	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1
	459	1328	82	95	1964	0	1228	112	766	2106	4070
ATTACHED:											
441st AAA Bn	1	2	-	1	4	-	15	-	1	16	20
601st TD Bn	4	1	-	1	6	-	35	-	12	47	53
756th Tk Bn	9	10	-	4	23	-	29	6	16	51	74

TABLE 3 - CUMULATIVE CASUALTY REPORT, 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION,
010001 THRU 302400 NOVEMBER 1944

REPLACEMENTS AND HOSPITAL RETURNEES

UNIT	REPL REC'D		RTU'S REC'D		TTL REPL & REPL REC'D		STRAGGLERS
	OFF	EM	OFF	EM	OFF	EM	
7th Inf	33	566	11	451	44	1017	70
15th Inf	15	795	9	506	24	1301	71
30th Inf	15	614	10	357	25	871	73
DIVARTY	3	1	1	1	4	2	-
9th FA	-	4	-	14	-	18	-
10th FA	-	6	1	17	1	23	1
39th FA	-	-	-	22	-	22	-
41st FA	-	6	-	10	-	16	1
10th Engr	1	27	1	18	2	45	3
3rd Med	-	1	-	3	-	4	-
Div HQ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3rd Rcn Trp	-	2	-	26	-	28	1
HQ Spt Trp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HQ Co	-	-	-	6	-	6	-
MP Plt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3rd Sig Co	-	1	-	1	-	2	-
3rd QM Co	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
703rd Ord Co	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Div Band	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	67	2024	33	1432	100	3456	220
ATTACHED							
441st AAA Bn	-	-	-	3	-	3	-
601st TD Bn	-	7	-	25	-	32	-
756th Tk Bn	-	22	-	15	-	37	-

TABLE 4 - REPLACEMENTS AND HOSPITAL RETURNEES, 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION,
010001 THRU 302400 NOVEMBER 1944

Logistically, the 3rd Infantry Division was well supported. The Division was equipped with nearly all its required wheeled and tracked combat vehicles. Combat equipment losses had been low for the first twenty days of November but naturally climbed with the MEURTHE RIVER crossing and the rapid advance that followed. Attached units greatly increased the Division's armored firepower. On 19 November, the Division began operations with 35 M-4 tanks mounting the older 75mm gun, 17 M4A3 tanks mounting 76mm guns (the first time this gun was used and gave the tanks considerably more punch), and 6 M4A3 vehicles mounting 105mm guns. In addition, the 756th Tank Battalion also had 16 light tanks. The 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion had 34 M10s mounting 3" guns. [16] These heavy weapons, when combined with the normal weapons of the infantry division, presented a formidable force. It had the full range of ordnance from small arms (the M1 rifle and .45 caliber pistol were the standard side arms) to 155mm howitzers in the Division Artillery. The supply of ammunition fully supported operations as a cursory review of ammunition reports show. For example, in November alone, the 3rd Infantry Division expended over 6000 rounds of 155mm, 60,000 rounds of 105mm, 10,000 rounds of 75mm and over 900,000 rounds of 30 caliber ammunition. [17] There is no record of shortages of ammunition or equipment causing an adjustment of plans or having an

impact on operations.

The Division also enjoyed excellent support from supporting units from Corps for the MEURTHE RIVER crossing operations. All these elements contributed to the successful accomplishment of the Division's tactical missions. Supply support from the rear had become sufficiently organized so that no serious problems were encountered during the month. While Corps had restricted ammunition for all artillery pieces and the 81mm mortars, the restrictions were sufficiently liberal to meet requirements. Rations and fuel supply became adequate to meet all demands. Class II support became very satisfactory; even the 1/4 ton truck shortages were filled by the end of the month. However, like most units along the front, as winter approached, the Division suffered from an initial lack of winter clothing. Though some winter clothing issues had been made, including gloves, overcoats and sweaters, no issue had been made for additional special items such as parkas, wool liners and waterproof covers. [18]

With the small combat losses, the well operated resupply system, and the extended training period prior to the attack, the Division needed little special equipment for the actual crossing. Special bridging equipment and boats were placed in support to the assaulting division by VI Corps. [18]

However, no attempt was made to attach Corps engineer units directly to either of the two lead divisions (3rd and 103rd) in the MEURTHE operation as the Corps engineer was bound by existing river conditions (heavily swollen) to construct crossings at specific sites. Liaison officers from the 36th Engineer Combat Regiment, however, were detailed to the respective Divisional engineers for the operation. A conference several days before the mission during the briefing period was called by the Corps Engineer with all division engineers and engineer battalion commanders. There the engineer support relationships were established and the available bridging apportioned to everyone's satisfaction.

1201

Selection and coordination of artillery positions was a problem because of the limited suitable areas available. Corps artillery, group commanders and division artillery commanders carried out joint reconnaissance to ensure equitable distribution and most advantageous positions for all types of weapons from 8" howitzers to multiple .50 caliber anti-aircraft halftracks. In addition to normal 3rd Infantry Division artillery battalions, 3 more 155 howitzer battalions, 1 more 155 gun battalion, 1 additional 8" howitzer battery, a tank destroyer battalion and an additional battery of 90mm anti aircraft guns were emplaced in the area of the

3rd Division for the main effort at the MEURTHE. Repeated staff conferences and coordination made night movements and fire mission execution run smoothly. [21] This artillery support was critical both before and during the crossing operation. For example, in order to cover the sound of movement and construction of assault bridging equipment along the MEURTHE RIVER at the start of the crossing operation, one round every 15 seconds for 20 minutes was fired on close-in enemy defenses on the opposite shore subsequent to a half-hour artillery preparation. The artillery also fired counterbattery and infantry support fire missions throughout the operation including over 10,100 rounds alone on the night of 19-20 November. [22]

The AAA battalion was used in support of the 15th Infantry Regiment along the Division's defensive positions on the river, firing harrassing missions along roads and at suspected enemy positions on the far shore. Utilization of this additional fire support in this mode to support ground tactical operations was facilitated by the US air superiority during the period. Not a single enemy aircraft was reported during POWERHOUSE I. The weapons of the AAA battalion included .50 caliber machine guns and 37mm guns. [23]

Allied close air support also proved a valuable combat multiplier despite adverse weather conditions. Rain

and clouds precluded air support for several periods immediately preceeding and during the MEURTHE crossing (such as the afternoon of 19 November and after 1030 on 20 November), but "blaze" bombing, fragmentation bombing and strafing runs were made on numerous targets at every available opportunity. [24] Strong points, enemy positions, and command and control centers were the usual targets engaged. A well rehearsed and effective VI Corps close air support control procedure used airborne observers and artillery spotter rounds and was coordinated through the air support team and an artillery officer at VI Corps headquarters. Through this close coordination of artillery and air representatives at the Corps headquarters, maximum assistance between artillery and air was effected and maximum efficiency of target attack was attained. [25]

The elements of the 3rd Chemical Battalion supported the Division during its MEURTHE crossing by providing assistance both before and during the operation. During the training period, instruction was given to demonstrate the use of chemical weapons and munitions for tank destroying purposes. A maintenance school for flamethrower repair was also conducted. The actual crossing operation was to mark the first use of M2 Smoke Generators by the Division. During crossing operations, 153 generator hours would be logged using

8100 gallons of fog oil and 612 gallons of gasoline. [26]

The dispersed division setting provided ideal cover and concealment of the division's forces prior to the attack and facilitated the training of the 7th and 30th Regiments clear of enemy observation. However, this also created a serious communications problem but one overcome by the Division's signal units. Wire was the basic means of communication for tactical control, with radio used in emergencies and for special situations. Signal installations were maintained at all echelons throughout the period.

In preparation for the MEURTHE crossing, an elaborate wire network was installed as follows: (1) Two circuits to each of the assault regiments and three to the reserve regiment; (2) A lateral circuit from each assault regiment to the reserve regiment; (3) Three circuits to division artillery with a lateral to the reserve regiment; (4) Four circuits to a division switch with circuits to two of the regiments, division artillery, tank battalion and to the 103rd Infantry Division; and (5) One circuit from the tank battalion to each of the assault regiments. [27] Lines were also installed to two division OPs, one of which had a switch board in operation with locals to two foot bridge sites and also to the other OP. As anticipated, considerable

trouble was encountered on all of these circuits due to the enemy artillery fire along the river. Even though communications were at times curtailed, it was never completely disrupted to any unit. After the river crossing was complete, the Division moved at a fairly rapid rate during which time only one line was maintained to the regiments. During this period, light separate division command post installations were made, six of those coming in the last ten days of November as the Division raced forward. Table 5 shows the extensive wire laying efforts undertaken by the Division to ensure secure communications.

COMMUNICATION WIRE LAYED AND RECOVERED IN
3RD INFANTRY DIVISION, NOVEMBER 1944

(all figures in miles)

<u>UNITS</u>	<u>INSTALLED</u>	<u>RECOVERED</u>
3rd Sig Co	592	131
DIVARTY & FA Bn	650	133
7th Inf	98	25
15th Inf	281	20
30th Inf	<u>221</u>	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	1842	309

Average number of cases of trouble per day = 7.8

Average clearance time per case of trouble = 1 hour and 52 minutes

TABLE 5 - WIRE LAYING, 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION
NOVEMBER 1944

Radio silence was enforced during the training and preparation period immediately prior to the river crossing. At other times, radio communications were maintained with all units with all radio traffic being administrative (all tactical information was passed only over wire). Terrain required the establishment of some relay stations to ensure continuous radio operations. In addition to actual traffic, the Division also used dummy radio traffic as part of its deception plan. [27]

These aspects of the 3rd Infantry Division and its support elements reflect a well organized and trained unit. All available resources were efficiently used to enhance the combat power of the two regiments spearheading the crossing. As early as 5 November, the Corps had begun deliberate preparation for the MEURTHE RIVER crossing to effectively integrate all the combat forces for a successful operation. General Brooks, VI Corps Commander, had issued his OPLAN for POWERHOUSE I outlining three possible courses of action (Plans A, B, and C) for conducting the operation. The three plans addressed crossing the MEURTHE with emphasis shifting among the Corps' divisions with each different concept. A key element was the progress the 100th Division made to the east of RAON L' ETAP. Initially, its unexpected favorable progress indicated that it would become the Corps' main effort, but

when it stalled, a change in plans facilitated the shift in the main effort back to the 3rd Division. At regiment level, only minor problems developed because of this late change due to the excellent prior planning. The 30th Infantry Regiment history notes: "Just before the attack was to take place a complete change of plan was ordered. Then a day later the original plan was ordered. Although some confusion resulted, the original plan was initiated and on the night of 19 November, the 30th Infantry, refreshed and well coordinated with its supporting units, moved out...." [29] Thus, careful and detailed prior planning was key to the mission .

Earlier on 8 November, the 3rd Infantry Division had issued OI # 94, the operation plan for POWERHOUSE I, crossing of the MEURTHE RIVER. Command relationships were established, realistic missions assigned, and units task organized for combat. Greatly adding to the Division's planning effort was its extensive intelligence preparation of the battlefield prior to the actual crossing.

Early in the operation planning, the Corps G-2 had stressed the importance of accurate and timely combat intelligence. The Corps G-2 required reports specifically identifying what, when, where, and source of information on the enemy. The flow of information, as evidenced from the 3rd Infantry Division G-2 reports of the period, was tremendous

thanks to a cooperative local populace, POW's who appeared all too ready to talk, and a plethora of captured enemy documents.

In fact, the opportunities to evaluate the information in detail were often overlooked because of the sheer mass of data available at division level. Often the enemy actions and intentions were completely obvious and available to Corps and Division planners. Efforts were made at Corps and Division level to discourage the use of relative terms in reporting such as "met heavy resistance" in order to force units to accurately portray the time picture of enemy activity. All units were instructed to transmit "by the most expeditious means available," direct to the Corps G-3, flash reports of new identifications, movement of enemy reserves, location of armored units and enemy air activity. [30]

The Corps report on the preparation for the MEURTHE crossing provides a glimpse of the extensive and coordinated intelligence preparation effort that took place during those last hectic days before the assault. The relatively static phase of the operation in mid-November increased the degree of coordination, the extent of the overall effort, and the accuracy of the analysis. "During the planning phase the Corps Target Intelligence Section, consisting of ACoS, G-2, G-2 Photo Interpreter, and an artillery intelligence officer processed all available intelligence on enemy supply

installations, troop concentrations, movement of men and material, rail and road nets, artillery positions, and strong points in order to prepare target recommendations for the Corps artillery and G-3 (Air). To support the attack on D-Day, special emphasis was placed on the preparation of intelligence for close support bombing and artillery fire in the enemy's main line of resistance. To provide maximum harassment of the enemy's MSR, the G-2 (Air) and G-3 (Air) coordinated the requests for visual tactical reconnaissance and armed reconnaissance. To supplement the tactical visual reconnaissance and to provide continuous surveillance of the target area, air artillery observers were employed to the maximum extent feasible without interference with artillery spotting missions, to observe and report enemy movements on the Corps' front with particular attention to road movements of motorized and mechanized forces." [31]

The intelligence data available was so extensive that the 3rd Infantry Division was able to regularly maintain and update daily an extremely accurate enemy order of battle which today rivals even data available from German sources. A typical example of this detailed information is the G-2 Periodic Report No. 92 of 16 November 1944 attached as Enclosure 1. It includes a complete analysis of the German organization and concept of defense, artillery positions,

terrain intelligence, a complete enemy order of battle throughout the VI Corps zone, and a very interesting German document translation on their perception of the conduct of the American soldier in battle. The information of tactical relevance was extensively used in the training phase for the MEURTHE RIVER operation.

ENCLOSURE 1 - 3RD INFANTRY DIVISION PERIODIC G-2 REPORT

NUMBER 92, 16 November 1944

Copy No 110

HEADQUARTERS THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION

Office of the A C of S, G-2

A. P. O. 3

From: 151200A November 1944

To : 161200A November 1944

Date: 161900A November 1944

G-2, PERIODIC REPORT

: Auth: CG, 3d Inf Div :

: Init: Has :

: Date: 16 November '44:

No 92.

MAPS: GSGS 4471, FRANCE 1/50,000,

1. ENEMY SITUATION AT END OF THE PERIOD.

a. Enemy Front Lines: Enemy occupies E bank of MEURTHE River in division zone.

b. Defensive Organization:

- (1) 15th Inf ground OP confirms barbed wire from V377720 to V378715, describing it as double apron.
- (2) 15th Inf reports digging and possible mine-laying during night at V363738.
- (3) The following information on enemy defenses and installations, reported by SSS agent, is rated E-3; it is given as of 152130A. The second and third defense lines have not been confirmed by Photo Interpreters.

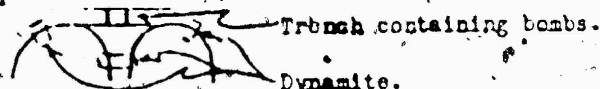
(a) CP of General HECKEL, 16 Division, in Chateau de la Suso, V41356460. HECKEL is there in day time only but his staff is there all the time. It is well guarded.

(b) Review of Enemy's Defense System:

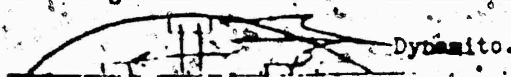
- (i) First Line: RAON L'ETAPE - CARRIERE DE GRANIT, ST BLAISE, CLAMMONTAINE, NE of LA HOLLANDE, LA VOITRE, ARZELAY, TLE de ST ROCH, LA VICKE RENI, LIJON, GRATIA, BROUPOINT, W of STE MARGUERITE, SAULAY and SAURLY.
- (ii) Second Line: RAON L'ETAPE, WILPAILLONT, W of HURELLE, LE VILIER, E of ST ROCH, ROUGEL, NUYEMONT and COLBRILLONT.
- (iii) Third Line: RAON L'ETAPE, E of ROYENMOUTIER, LA CHAPILLE, LA FONTECELLE, LUNOIS, CUL du L.S. COLROY-la-GRANDE and CUL DE SALES.

(c) Bridges.

- (i) The three main bridges at ST DIE at V413654, V417653, and V423653 have not yet been blown but are mined as follows:



- (ii) Foot bridges at V412657 and V419653 have been blown.
- (iii) RR bridges at V396663 and V404656 have been blown.
- (iv) RR bridges at V421647 and V427643 are mined as follows:



- (v) Road bridge at V395662 is mined and also barricaded.

(d) Artillery.

1x AT gun at V405655 on N side road 100m E of RR bridge. It is in place only by day.

Classification changed to restricted by
Authority of AC of S, G-2, Ray M. Sproupe,
Captain, Infantry, 12 April 46. Declassified
June 21, 1965

or heard east of MEURTHE River, and harassing artillery fire directed on road centers such as NEUFATELIZE, ST. REMY and LA BOURGOISSE at intervals throughout period. A 10-man enemy patrol crossed river into our zone during night, the first time such aggressive action has been reported indicating enemy is evaluating his defensive organization and attempting to discover our dispositions and intentions. Agent reports enemy has virtually destroyed northeast half of ST DIE as well as many smaller settlements in ST DIE area, leaving estimated 45,000 civilians in vicinity of SW part of ST DIE.

- (2) 100th Inf Div: Contact with enemy lost vicinity NEUFATELISON - RAOUL L'ETALLE road at 82 grid northing about noon, 15 November, but was regained east of highway by midafternoon. Some machine gun fire received. During morning 16 November, our attack was directed E vicinity V346834 and V353810, and S vicinity V348808, with little resistance reported.
- (3) 103rd Inf Div: Little change in situation during first part of period. Enemy met our attack morning 16 November with S/A and MG fire from Hill 623, V3863 but little artillery and mortar fire was reported.

b. Activities of Component Elements.

- (1) Infantry: Only specific activity of enemy infantry was that of 10-man patrol which crossed MEURTHE River vicinity V359737 shortly after dark 15 November; our troops fired MG's and mortar flare, but our patrol found no traces of enemy patrol. Other infantry activity: 10 enemy seen on road from V400718 to V399718 at noon 15 November; personnel at V382772 fired on by our artillery; enemy mortar firing from V383764 silenced by our infantry cannon.

(2) Artillery:

Scattered harassing fire fell intermittently throughout the afternoon and evening, falling off sharply during the night and early morning hours. The preponderance of the enemy's artillery fire fell in the vicinity of V353735 where a total of 45 rounds, apparently fired by a battery of 105mm guns between 2115A and 2155A, was received. 9 rounds of 105mm artillery fire were received at V345699 and 5 rounds believed to be 105mm fell in the vicinity of V344688 at 1500. Sporadic shell fire was reported landing at V357717 fired by what appeared to be an SP gun at 2230. The area at V325686 received 6 rounds of 105mm fire coming from the East at 2230. ST REMY was reported receiving 30 to 40 rounds of artillery fire believed fired by 2 or 3 SP guns at 0955. 14 shelling reports were received indicating a total of approximately 250 rounds of light caliber artillery fire landing in the division zone throughout the period. 1 observed and 11 unobserved counter battery missions were fired. The estimated artillery strength remains unchanged at three battalions of light, two batteries of medium, a number of SP guns and five or six batteries of heavy ML guns.

- (3) Engineers: Our sub reports no bridges over MEURTHE River still in between ST DIE and a point E. of CLAIRFONTAINE. Highway bridges E. of MEURTHE River over tributary streams are still in, but some of the RR bridges have been blown. Enemy again heard sawing and chopping wood just E of ST MICHELE bridge.

Two batteries of 4x106mm truck-drawn shifting constantly along road from farm La Goutte V418672 to Pont des Raids V426686.
 2x77mm emplaced beside Farm Le Paradis V427668.
 2x77mm 20-30m S of Farm Le Purgatoire V432668.
 3x77mm at Farm L'Enfer V437666.
 1x77mm at Col d'Hermanpere farmhouse V487693.
 3x106mm 30m NW of Hadibu farmhouse V435698.

(e) Communications.

Radio station at Aulnez Farm V421712. (Note: In view of Seventh Army's request for possible radar locations, agent was questioned closely. He believes station is solely a morse station).

(f) Defenses.

AT ditch from V377751 to V380720 to V385710.

(g) Roads.

Road from V373727 to BOIS de CHENE SCIEUX to HEMBAULT to PETIT HEMBAULT to LA BERGERIE to MOYENMOUTIER has not been fortified or mined.

Small lane passing under RR at V403656 into ST DIE has been mined.

c. Units in Contact: No definite information. On the basis of contact established by units on our right and left flanks, it is believed elements of 716 Inf Div occupy defensive positions between ST DIE and MOYENMOUTIER, with 1417 Fortress Inf Bn between MOYENMOUTIER and RAON L'ETAPPE and 708 Volksgrenadier Div extending north of the latter town; 757 GR possibly located just west of ST DIE, and a battle group including 201 and 202 Mtn Bns and 292 z.b.V. Bn holding the hill mass southwest of ST DIE. Movement on the road net north of ST DIE has probably involved supply movements, arrival of replacements and local reliefs, as it is doubtful whether the enemy can spare a large new formation for this area when he is so hard-pressed for reinforcements at other points of the western front.

d. Artillery: Following new gun positions reported:

V383783	- (Div Art - Civilian)	
V390765	"	"
V407765	"	"
V380745	"	"
2 Lcd-V435690	"	French Agent)
4 SP -V423682	"	"
3x105 -V435690	"	"
1 Lcd-V44206885	"	"
2 Lcd-V43160865	"	"
2 Lcd-V4438605	"	"
2 Lcd-V4356884	"	"
3 Lcd-V438655	"	"
1 Lcd-V447648	"	"
2 Lcd-V41136390	"	"

(Note: Location of 18 medium pieces - more than a battalion - in comparatively small area noted above is questionable. If the report is otherwise accurate, some of these pieces are probably light caliber).

UNCLASSIFIED

afternoon 18 November; 18 personnel and 12 vehicles at V415749; and 3 prime movers at V400714 during afternoon; vehicle movement (some horse-drawn) from V356732 SE to LA HOLLANDE during night.

(6) Miscellaneous: Enemy believed using factory at V35747 for OP; factory has chimney with hole 2 feet square in it. Our artillery fire along road ST-DIE - CLAIRFONTAINE started fires at LA PERRIERE, LA VOIVRE and LA HOLLANDE evening 18 November.

MISCELLANEOUS

- a. Cf. Annex "A", Order of Battle of Army Group "G".
- b. Cf. Annex "B", Extracts from Information Bulletin #31, Hqrs, 7th Army.
- c. Cf. Annex "C", Report of SSS Agent.
- d. Terrain Intelligence: Our engineer patrol reports river at V370712 is 5 feet deep in center, with swift current and good gravel bottom. Small, marshy island in river at that point; ground on east bank also marshy and soft. Trail vicinity V37113 has gravel topping, but is soft and unsuitable for vehicles. Another patrol reports ground on west side of MEURTHE River for 1500 yards north from ST MICHEL bridge site is muddy, knee-deep in places. A third patrol reported trail leading under railroad trestle at V364727 is chest-deep in water.
- e. 100 Inf Div reports a tub plane bearing number "60" has flown over friendly positions, its visits being accompanied by accurate enemy artillery fire. This plane may be a captured one now in use by the enemy. Since all VI Corps planes bear letter designations, the appearance of such a plane, accompanied by enemy artillery fire, in 3rd Div zone should be a signal for opening fire on the plane.
- f. Propaganda Leaflets: "Enemy propaganda leaflets are to be destroyed immediately, with the exception of one sample which is to be forwarded through channels. Anybody having leaflets in his possession who does not turn them in at once will be charged with treason. Suspicious elements in the ranks of each unit must be recognized in time. They are to be turned over to court-martial at once. In the case of an attempted escape or if a man's intention for desertion has been noticed, the nearest comrade is to use his firearms. It is to be known to every man that it is his duty to report suspicious cases, treason, and desertion at once, and to shoot the deserter in case of escape without regard to sentiment." (From Special Orders of 4 Co, 61 Fortress MG Bn, dated 26 Oct 1944). (Source: 36th Inf Div G-2 Report No 269, 14 Nov 1944).
- g. Weather Forecast for 17 November: Light snow showers in afternoon, cloudy sky. Visibility 1 to 2 miles at dawn with fog improving to 5 to 8 miles after 1000. Wind NW 5 mph. Minimum temperature about 34 degrees. For 18 November: Scattered showers throughout day and cloudy sky. Visibility zero at dawn with fog improving to 5 to 8 miles after 1000. Wind SE 5 to 10 mph. Same Temperature.

4. ENEMY CAPABILITIES.

- a. defend from prepared positions E of the MEURTHE River.
- b. To use the MEURTHE River line merely as a delaying position, and to continue to fall back through the VOSGES.

d. To ~~bo~~erattack to prevent our crossing the MEURINE River and deny
us footholds E of the river.

e. Capability a is favored.

DISTRIBUTION "X".

Wilson
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G-2 *How*

HEADQUARTERS FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION
Office of the A.C. of S. C-2
I. T. C. #3

Annex "A"
to

C-2 Periodic Report No 92.

ARMY GROUP "G" P/T/L/F OTHER

U/C Maj Gen WILGER	XX 416 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen WIMATH Col FRIEDLMEIER	XX 19 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Col RIEKE	X 106 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Maj Gen LUEPKE (?)	XX 462 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen OSTERTAG	XX 175 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Maj Gen FASSEL	XX 48 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Col von MUELLER	XX 559 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Col FRIEDLMEIER	XX 361 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Col FRIEDLMEIER	XX 553 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen FRIEDLMEIER	XX 708 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen RICHTER	XX 716 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen ACHMANN (FIA 14/11 or 15/11)	XX 336 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen HAECHERL	XX 16 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen SCHILL	XX 198 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen SCHILL	XX 269 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Col PERNER	XX 159 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER
U/C Brig Gen von OETTEL	XX 159 ID	XX LXXII GEN D / ARTY STINGER

XXXX
FIRST
GEN D. INFANTRY
VON DER CHEVALERIE

XXXXX
ARMY GROUP "G"
GEN D. ARTY B/LF

XXXX
INFANTRY
GEN D. INFANTRY
WEISE

XXXX
LXXIV
GEN D. INFANTRY
KNIES

THIRD ARMY

SEVENTH ARMY

FRENCH ARMY

NOTE: BALCK, the reported successor to BLASKOWITZ, is the son of a Lieutenant General and saw action as a Lieutenant in World War I on both the Western and Italian fronts. After the war BALCK was transferred to the REICHSWEHR and climbed the military ladder to the rank of Oberst in September of 1940 when he was reported commanding a brigade in France. In August of 1942, shortly after he had been given the command of the 11th Panzer Division in Russia, his promotion to General Major was announced. This was followed, on 1 January 1943, by his promotion to rank of Generalleutnant. In June 1943, BALCK was reported commanding the Pz Div GROSSDEUTSCHLAND for a short time and in March 1944 he commanded the 48th Panzer Corps at TARNOPOL. In August he was commanding the FOURTH PZ Army in RUSSIA. More recently he has been known to be on the WESTERN front where he has been reported by the German press as being in command of a Panzer Corps. He is reported to be a keen NAZI which would certainly help him overcome the handicap of a lack of seniority for his reported new command.

16 November 1944

Annex "B"

to

G-2 Periodic Report No 92.

Extracts from G-2 Information Bulletin #31, Hqrs. 7th Army.

1. The Tank Kracker.

The following is a translation of a German document concerning an enemy anti-tank grenade:

"THE TANK KRACKER" Manual for the Close-Range Anti-Tank Fighter, Manual 77/3 High Command of the Army, Army General Staff/ the Tank Officer.

Reference to the use of DAZZLING AGENTS in the above publication:

The most effective screening agent is the glass smoke grenade. It produces results as soon as the glass breaks. It not only dazzles but also makes breathing inside the tank impossible. The smoke lasts for several minutes. The smoke hand grenade becomes effective after 4 1/2 seconds. Its smoke also lasts about 2 1/2 minutes.

Glass smoke grenades should be thrown only on the tank itself. The bow is the best place, because then all the smoke will go inside the tank.

If you have no glass smoke grenade, you still have the smoke hand grenade.

Frequently you must first slow down or stop the enemy. The best way to do that is with glass smoke grenades. But you must get them on the tank just right. Otherwise, they are useless.

If the glass smoke grenades burst on the tank itself, the crew will usually bail out at once. Then fire immediately. The time the crew climbs out is the most advantageous. Thus, the tank falls into your hands undamaged, and captured tanks are of greater value than heaps of wreckage.

Handle with care in any case, or it is you whom the smoke will chase.

2. Comments on American Tactics

American soldiers deliver heavy automatic fire but it is poorly aimed, and fire often goes as high as 15-20 meters above the ground.

American soldiers should make more use of camouflage and cover. They approach German lines too slowly and too conspicuously. Scout squads are immediately detected during the day because they run erect, do not make good use of cover, and often open fire when on a scouting mission.

Continuous mortar fire is excellent and has a demoralizing effect on German troops. However, it often falls too far behind the positions or on roads and places where there are no troops. PW's opinion is that outposts are too far from main line. Mortar fire however often succeeded in pinning the Germans in their dug-outs. Heaviest casualties were inflicted by fire from long range when the discharge of the mortar could not be heard.

In the sector of the right pl of 5 Co, 210AERIAL Bn, two US tanks broke through the German lines at 1700 hrs. The soldiers saw the tanks and ran away. The fear of the tanks and the action of the fragmentation shells demoralized them to such an extent that they made no use of their PANZERSCHRECKE and FLUSTPATRONEN (bazookas and grenade launchers). The pl was captured, and although a gap resulted in the front line the American soldiers did not drive through. At the time a breakthrough of about 2 km would have been possible, permitting the capture of a CP and its entire staff. A similar unexploited breakthrough took place on the left flank of the Bn in the 6 Co sector. Because of this hesitation on the part of the Americans to attack it was possible for the Germans to bring up reserves and close the gap on the right flank. The other gap on the left flank remained open until 0600 hrs, 16 Oct., when two Co's counter-attacked and were repulsed by American fire. The Germans had no communication with their arty, their officers being afraid to go up forward to the advanced OP. A Pfc was sent, but because of his lack of training he could not direct arty fire or repair the telephone lines.

PW has the following advice to offer, based upon his experiences: Employ a large number of tanks during an attack. Fire mostly fragmentation and HE shells, thus pinning down the German soldiers. When a breakthrough has been achieved, drive forward immediately with tanks against close anti-tank combat. Simultaneously, recommence arty and mortar fire, the latter because it is feared most by the German soldiers. Phosphorous shell fire, which has the best effect, should always be used.

4. Effect of American Tanks

The weakest part of the Sherman tank, the Germans are taught, is just below the gun barrel; therefore every 75mm A/T gunner is taught to aim for this point. But, fearful of missing this spot and giving away his position without damaging the tank, the gunners withhold their fire. If the tank advances rapidly and fires a large amount of HE, and also makes extensive use of the HMG, the mission will be very successful. The tank should advance to at least within 150 yards of the German 75mm A/T gun before opening fire. Source is of the opinion that the main disadvantage of the 75mm Pak is its weight, which makes it very difficult to move.

He advises keeping under mortar fire all roads and crossroads where A/T gun positions have been identified, and then have the tanks advance and, if possible, using phosphorous shells.

5. Enemy Artillery Practices

PW from artillery (105mm Arty Btry)

"The OP was to direct fire on targets of opportunity but firing was limited to times when the danger of discovery was slight. They never fired when planes were overhead and always used salt packs during night firing. Frequently one big emplacement was dug for the crew of each gun. Positions were changed frequently due to fear of U.S. counterbattery. Ammunition was limited and specific allotments had to be obtained for each firing mission. Although camouflage nets were not available, camouflage discipline was stressed and extensive use was made of natural materials. Long range guns did, at times, have nets and were further camouflaged by cutting and planting small trees around the position. These are planted in holes not more than 5 feet deep and if necessary are braced with wires."

PW stated that radio communication was used only after the failure of all efforts to use wire. Clear text messages predominate in radio traffic, he stated, due to lack of trained radio personnel.

*(Source: IPW Report 2d Corps, 10 Nov 1944)

UNCLASSIFIED

C. (Very Irritable)

A common question asked the Allied PW is the effectiveness of the V-1. The usual answer is- "Never heard of it", which is considered the most irritating answer possible. The Intelligence officer keeps a complete record of shoulder patch designs to aid in identifying units. XX Corps patch is still listed among the unidentified. 95th Inf Div was identified from the patch worn by a wounded PW. The Intelligence officer expressed amazement regarding the infinite thoroughness with which American Intelligence operates. He cannot understand how most of the information is obtained, chiefly propaganda leaflets mentioning individual staff members. He has often praised American versatility and criticised his own staff for not being able to cope with this propaganda. The Intelligence officer plans a general policy of sending officers on patrols because too many enlisted men desert when sent out. The patrol to which PW belonged was the first of this type. (XX Corps)

(Source: G-2 Periodic Report No. 16, 79th Inf Div. 9 Nov 1944)

16 November 1944

Annex "C"

to

G-2 Periodic Report No. 92.

Destruction of Parts of ST. DIE by Germans.
(Source: SSS Agents; Classification B-3).

1. The following is an eye witness report by agent of the wholesale destruction by fire and dynamite of St. Die and surrounding villages. The agent was put through the lines 8 November 1944 with a radio set and returned 16 November 1944.

2. At 110700 hrs the enemy evacuated women, children and the aged from the north bank of St. Die to the south bank, telling the population that the Americans were planning to fire-bomb St. Die and that the Germans wished to save their lives. All able bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45 as previously reported by SSS had already been evacuated. Agent says they were sent to Strasbourg.

3. During the 11/12 November 1944, 100 soldiers under the command of Captain Schneider systematically looted the evacuated area.

4. At 131200 hrs enemy began the burning of St. Die by firing the home of Mr. Dumonil, pharmacist, place Jules Ferry. On the wall of this home there was a plaque commemorating the fact that St. Die sent the first ship load of men and supplies to go from France to fight on the American side in the Revolutionary War. The hotel de Ville and the adjacent building housing the labor bureau, both on the west side of Rue Thiers, were set on fire next. Then all the buildings on the east side of Rue Thiers were fired. At 1500 hrs enemy began setting fire to buildings on Rue Stanislaus, and Rue ST. Charles. At 2000 hrs Rue des Trois Villes was fired. Both gasoline and incendiary grenades were used to start the fires, and small charges of dynamite were used to destroy all valuable machinery.

5. At 140830 hrs the hotel du Globe near the main bridge and the large building known as Maison de Andre Brajon opposite the hotel were fired. The incendiary crews then fired the quai Pastourel, quai du Parc and Rue du Parc. Later in the day new fires were set throughout the north bank of the city to destroy everything that was left. The chateau de Lessoux V419657 was the only building enemy did not attempt to burn.

6. At 150800 hrs Captain Schneider's crews moved to the south bank and began the destruction of all of that part of the city between the river and the main E-W street. The Electric Co. (Lorraine Electricite) was set on fire first after all machinery had been destroyed. Next they burned Maison Scierie Jacquot, and then moved along Rue d'Hollicule, Rue de la Monantello, Rue de la Prairie, Place St. Martin and Rue des Cites. Two of the larger places destroyed by dynamite and fire were a foundry, Maison Payer, and a clothes factory, Tissage Lathal. At Place St. Martin the people were given ten minutes notice before their homes were burned. On the south bank as on the north bank systematic looting preceded the destruction.

7. Agent states there are now approximately 45,000 refugees in the area south west of St. Die bounded by these coordinates: V402655, V427652 and V417-534. There are 7,000 people in the Foucharupt Hospital V418644 which was built to accommodate 700. There are 200 people who have been without food for several days in the section called Hollicule V406660.

8. The following villages also have been destroyed: La bank of Etival, La Hollande, Moyenneville, Hurbache, La Voivre, Le Villier, La Pacherie, Margelay, Tete de St. Roch, Gratin, Dijon, Robasche, Ste. Marguarite, Remondet, Saulcy, St. Leonard and La Planquette.

9. La Bolle V382862 has been evacuated and the houses converted into MG nests.

10. At Etival on 14 November 1944, a Mr. and Mrs. Hayant (agent not certain of spelling) were locked in their home and the home was dynamited.

11. Agent says the destruction of St. Die was ordered by General Heckerl who arrives at Chateau de la Suse V1356460 each morning from the direction of Saulcy and leaves toward Saulcy each night. The chateau was still being used 15 November 1944 as the enemy CP for St. Die.

Another particularly interesting aspect of this intelligence summary is the report of the German destruction of ST. DIE on pages 11 and 12. Besides the ruthless approach undertaken by the Germans, added irony can be found in the lack of intervention by US forces to prevent, stop, or somehow preclude this act. This town had special significance in that ST. DIE sent the first boatload of men and supplies from France to fight on the side of the Americans in our Revolutionary War.

Training and other preparations followed lessons learned from the Corps crossing of the MOSELLE RIVER in September 1944 and existing doctrine as delineated in FM 100-5, Operations, FM 5-5, Engineer Troops and Operations, and FM 5-6, Operations of Engineer Field Units. The development of the crossing plans and its eventual execution followed closely the guidance in FM 100-5.

Extensive reconnaissance and coordination with aviation units were particularly stressed in the doctrine and actively pursued by the Division. Reconnaissance along the MEURTHE RIVER began in October with map and topographic studies assisted by French authorities, especially the Department of Ports et Chausses and Department of Eau et Forets. As the actual operation date approached and as soon as the tactical situation permitted, tactical units began

actual on-site reconnaissance of their assigned crossing areas. An added benefit of this intensive effort resulted in a recon patrol from the 15th Infantry Regiment establishing itself on the far shore the day before the assault and constantly feeding updated intelligence on the river and enemy up to and during the assault. As previously discussed, the coordination with combat aviation resulted in excellent support under less than favorable weather conditions.

Other aspects of the doctrine, including tactical grouping, use of engineers, coordination of artillery and use of smoke, were meticulously followed. The careful planning and aggressive execution in accordance with doctrine ensured success despite poor weather conditions and the swollen river with its rapid current and the deteriorated bank conditions. Perhaps a significant departure could be found in the early use of foot bridges to cross the MEURTHE. FM 5-6 dated April 1943 called for foot bridges to be "...reserved for crossing succeeding waves of foot troops after the first objectives have been attained...." [32] This caution was made assuming the construction of foot bridges under direct small arms fire would be too costly and difficult. At the MEURTHE, however, early insertion of foot bridges, and shortly thereafter the vehicle bridges, at the very start of the operation under strict noise and light discipline, was a key in the success

of the operation. Clearly the elements of secrecy and surprise, also stressed in the doctrine and later after action reports, were successful ingredients to complement this, and other, bold departures from established procedures.

But all the planning would have been for naught without the soldiers to execute the complex instructions. The 3rd Infantry Division was blessed with experienced and dedicated soldiers, veterans of ANZIO and several months of fighting in France. Leadership was superior and discipline was strong. Already, members of the Division were becoming world famous such as Audie Murphy of the 15th Infantry Regiment.

Unfortunately for the soldiers, but normal for the region, a severe winter was beginning this November. Snow, freezing rain, and sub-freezing temperatures were typical during the days before the assault. Generally, the weather throughout the period was unfavorable for the welfare of the troops and became the biggest morale concern of the command. The static positions during the training period before the crossing ironically exacerbated the situation by restricting movement of soldiers, especially the infantrymen along the defensive line west of the MEURTHE. The muddy terrain and cold temperatures contributed to recurrent and new cases of

trench foot and to the rise in incidences of upper respiratory infections. For example, trench foot increased from 160 cases in October to 448 in November. In spite of disease and the unavoidable battle casualties, the Division worked hard to ensure medical care and evacuation demonstrated a sincere concern for the soldier. No soldiers died between points of the evacuation system, and only two died in the Division clearing station throughout the month of November. [33]

When the night of 19 November 1944 arrived, a determined, well trained and well equipped 3rd Infantry Division moved out to spearhead the VI Corps' assault across the MEURTHE RIVER. Hard days of training in unforbidding weather and long hours of coordination and planning every facet of this combined arms effort were soon to be put to the final test. The 3rd Infantry Division, over 14,100 soldiers strong, was ready and able to meet its mission.

German Forces - Army Group G (A-GP-G).

The forces of VI (US) Corps and the 3rd Infantry Division were poised to attack the weary German forces under General Balck known as Army Group G (A-GP-G). A-GP-G was a command created out of the string of German defeats in France since the NORMANDY landings. All German troops retreating

from southwestern and southern France and from the Paris sector came under the control of A-GP-G. The Army Group was composed of the First Army, Fifth Panzer Army, and the Nineteenth Army. It was the Nineteenth Army that was to oppose the US crossing of the MEURTHE. The organizational structure of A-GP-G during November 1944 is shown in Figure 2. The relentless push of the US forces had pushed the Army Group steadily back until October 1944 when the American forces appeared to break off for a period of rest in preparation for a renewed offensive. A-GP-G seized the opportunity to concentrate on holding and fortifying the existing front, form a panzer reserve, construct defensive positions and bring up additional replacements. The condition of personnel and equipment in the Army Group had grown extremely critical as the use of retreating forces to man the various units meant the whole force was based on demoralized, ill equipped, and exhausted soldiers.

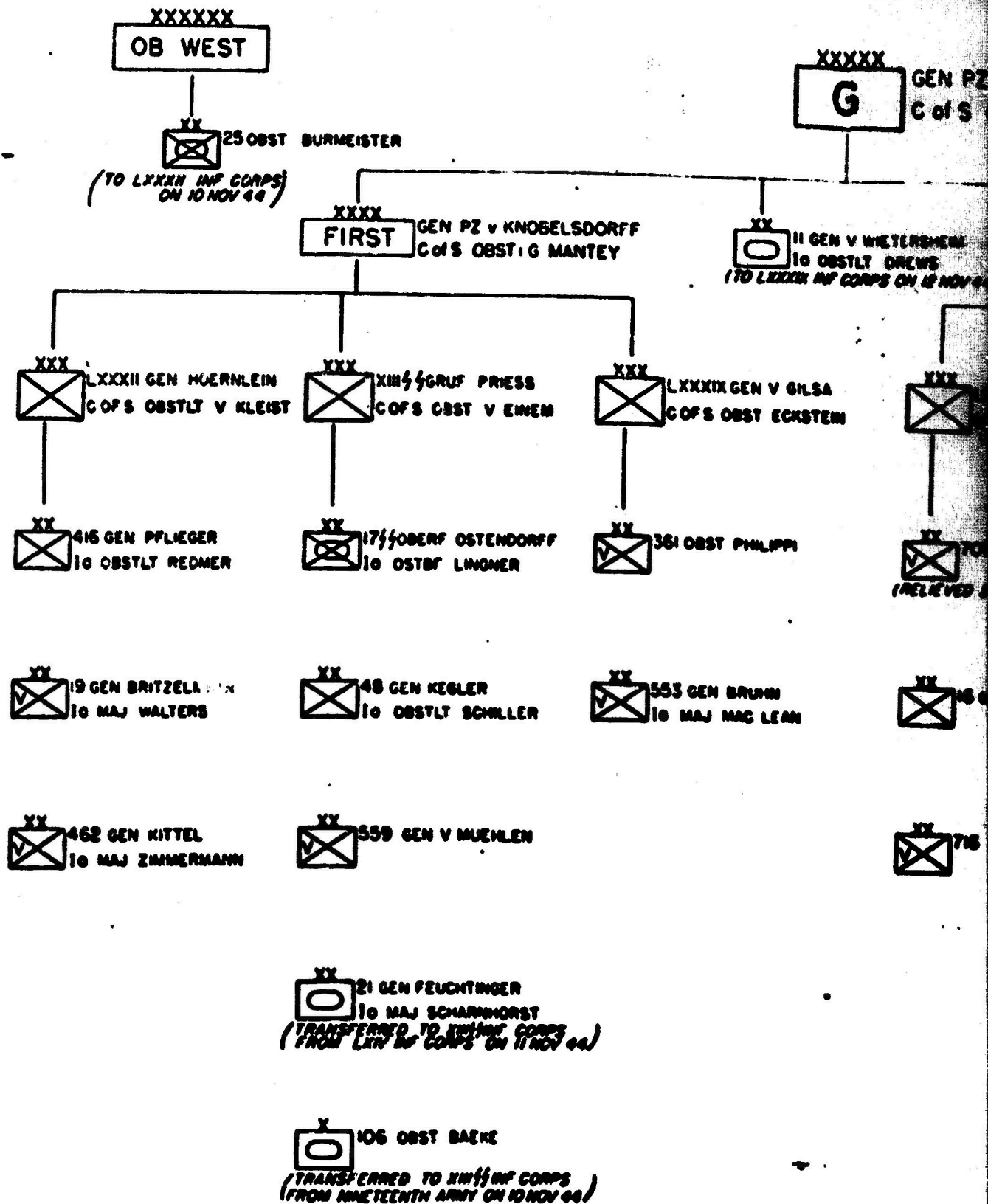


FIGURE 2

XXXXX

G

GEN PZ BALCK

C of S OBST i G v MELLENTIN

A GP G ORDER OF BATTLE

9 NOV 44

XX

II GEN V WIETERSHEIM

10 OBSTLT DREWS

TO LXXXIX INF CORPS ON 12 NOV 44)

XXXX

NINETEENTH

GEN INF WIESE

C of S GENLT BOTSCH

GEN V GILSA
BST ECKSTEIN



LXIV GEN THUMM

C of S OBSTLT BAHR



IV GEN PETERSEN

C of S OBST FRANK



LXXXV GEN KNISS

C of S OBST BEHLE

PHILIPPI



708 GEN KRIEGER

(RELIEVED 21 PZ DIV ON 10 NOV 44)



198 GEN SCHIEL



159 OBST DERNEN

BRUNN
MAC LEAN



16 GEN HAECKEL



184 GEN V SCHWERIN



189 GEN DEGENER



716 GEN RICHTER



269 GEN WAGNER



338 GEN OSCHMANN



BELFORT FEST
GEN V OPPEN

PREPARED BY USFET: MD, OMGB

APPROVED BY: [Signature]

38

At the same time, the strategic plans of the German High Command influenced the build up of forces against the imminent 3rd Division attack. OKW had started preparations for the German counteroffensive in the ARDENNES (the well known Battle of the Bulge to be launched in December). OKW desired to create a strong front level reserve for this operation, and therefore, A-GP-G was ordered to hold rigidly in its existing position without any additional forces. Further, within A-GP-G there was an anticipation that the soon-to-be-launched American offensive would be directed toward METZ. As a result, First Army was granted priority on replacements, supplies, and rehabilitation of units. The Nineteenth Army, soon to feel the attack of the 3rd Division across the MEURTHE received no help in these critical last few days before the assault.

Operations elsewhere also thinned out the Nineteenth Army forces along the MEURTHE. The French Army had been experiencing success in the south near BELFORT against the left flank of A-GP-G. The situation was so critical that A-GP-G agreed to give up the BELFORT Pass and make a massive withdrawal of the Nineteenth Army forces nearly 40 kilometers to MUELHAUSEN (see Map 2, A-GP-G Situation 7 November 1944). In addition to giving up indefensible terrain, the move would free two divisions for use to reinforce the threatened area

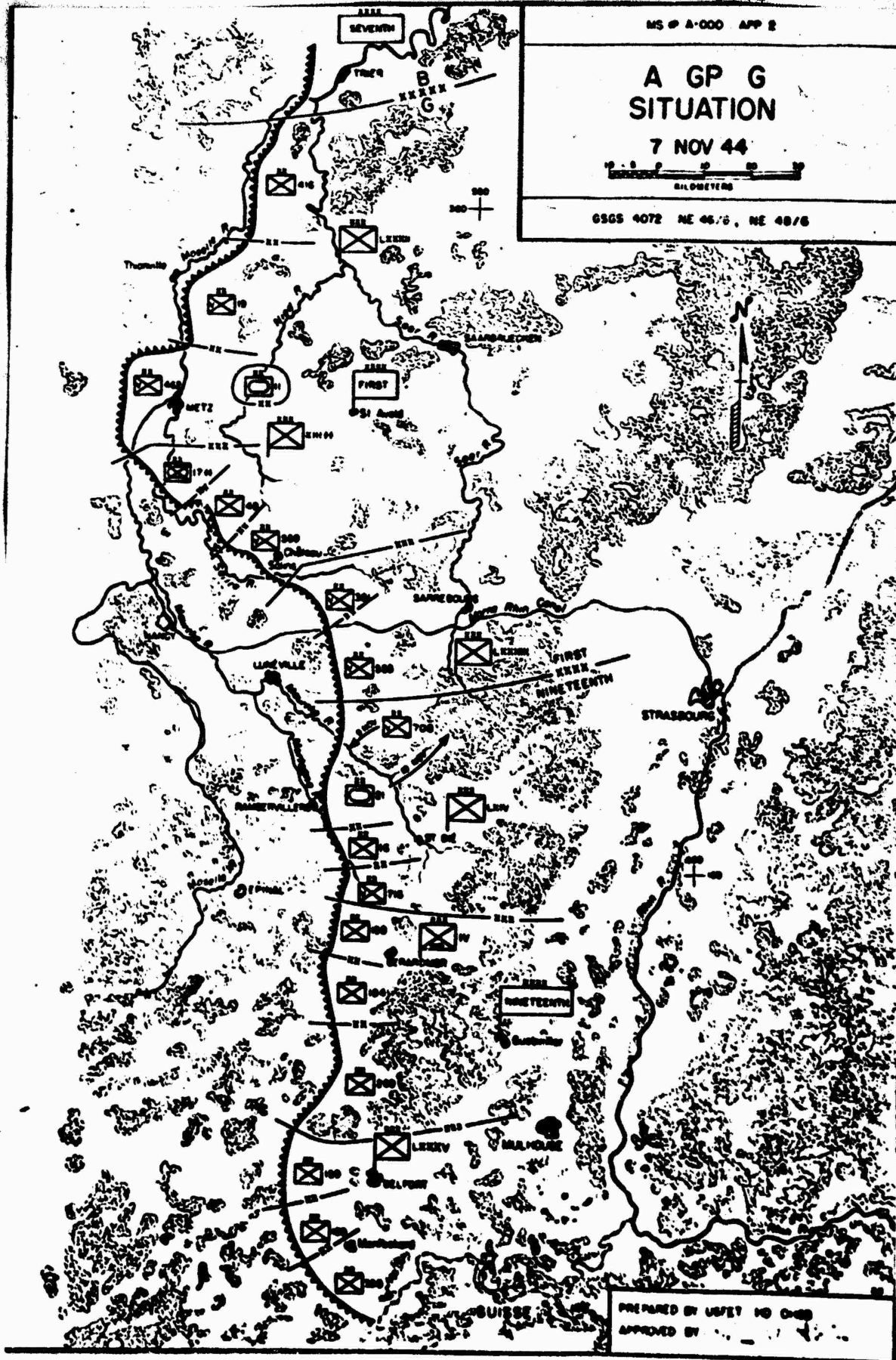
the German's called the SAVERNE GAP, an area essentially following the MARNE-RHINE CANAL. This area was just north of the 3rd Infantry Division's axis of attack. However, this proposal was rejected by the Fuehrer Hauptquartier, Hitler's headquarters in the field, and A-GP-G was directed to restore the situation at BELFORT by counterattack and also not to relinquish a single foot of ground at SAVERNE. [34] Without additional forces, this unrealistic requirement on Nineteenth Army in the south and the inability to obtain reinforcements for First Army at METZ or SAVERNE severely strained A-GP-G's ability to wage an effective defense. Since the Group remained convinced that the Allied emphasis would be along the SAVERNE GAP and points north, Nineteenth Army was further weakened with the reassignments of the 21st Panzer Division and 106th Panzer Brigade to First Army to protect the northern approaches. As a result, all armor units were removed from the American's 3rd Infantry Division's axis of advance. In its place, the inexperienced 708th Volks Grenadier Division was thrown into the critical MEURTHE RIVER region, directly across from the 3rd Infantry Division.

A GP G SITUATION

7 NOV 44

Kilometers

GS65 4072 NE 45/6, NE 48/6



PREPARED BY USFET NO 0-00
APPROVED BY

The newly activated 708th Volks Grenadier Division was incomplete and not sufficiently trained. The subordinate commanders, 80% of whom came from the Navy, were not equal to the difficult conditions and great demands that were to be put upon them. [35] The 708th was bordered on the north by the 553rd Division, the left flank of the First Army and on the south by the 16th Division. The German's shifted their main line of resistance from west of BACCARAT on 8 November to east of ROAN L'EWTAPE by the 16th of November (see MAP 3, A-GP-G Situation 8 and 16 November 1944). This greatly extended the lines of the Nineteenth Army and practically separated the First and Nineteenth Army as the 553rd and 708th Divisions were unable to maintain contact. Throughout this front, combat infantry units were so desperately understrength that a continuous line of defense could not be formed. At some points, companies consisted of only 8 to 10 able bodied men. [36] A shrinking pool of infantrymen had to support exclusively the burden of combat. They had been committed constantly for months and their psychological and moral strength was strained to human endurance. Tired and exhausted, the soldiers often did not find enough strength to offer much resistance against outflanking movements by American assault elements. Under these circumstances, the Germans could not establish any meaningful reserves and nearly all combat units were committed to front line

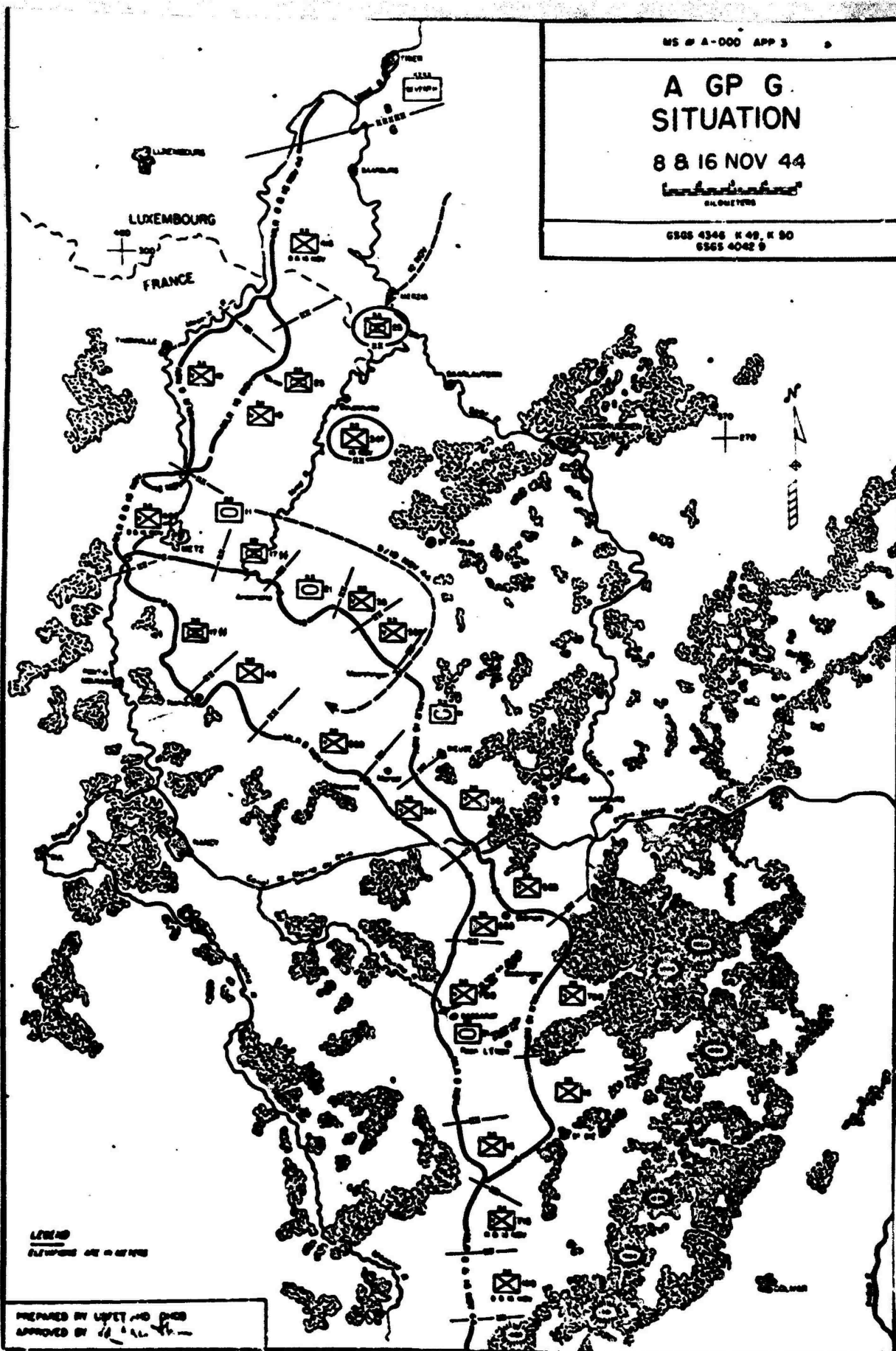
positions. Supplies of ammunition for artillery and gasoline were scarce, and equipment as well as winter clothing were deficient.

MS # A-000 APP 3

A GP G SITUATION

8 & 16 NOV 44

0505 4346 K 49, K 50
0505 4042 9



LEGEND
SYMBOLS ARE IN BRACKETS

PREPARED BY LIFT AND GIB
APPROVED BY [Signature]

With most of the MEURTHE RIVER bridges destroyed, the retreat to the east bank proved a traumatic effort for the Nineteenth Army. Casualties in the battles between the MORTAGNE and the MEURTHE RIVERS were considerable. The only reinforcements were forest troops who were used mainly for rear guard and limited counterattacks which attempted to slow the American onslaught.

The leadership of even the veteran divisions found command and control in this very hilly country extremely difficult due to the lack of communications equipment. US artillery fire continued to rain down on all German positions, and forward positions found the US mortar fire extremely difficult to overcome. [37] As a result, the commanders were often unable to maintain control over the withdrawals. Further, units were constantly harrassed by the French underground. The actual crossing over the frozen MEURTHE RIVER had been difficult. The retreating units had been led to believe they would move into prepared defensive positions. Instead, they found shallow intermittent trenches full of water and choked with mud and wire entanglements. Even though the Higher Command as early as August had fixed the region for construction of defensive positions, intentions did not come to more than the initial surveying and marking of the terrain.

As the situation grew ever more critical, the High

Command sent forward any available men for reinforcements, but often the results only exacerbated the situation. A battalion of 300 men was sent to the 16th Infantry Division, but it consisted entirely of men afflicted with disease and without any combat training. Within a few days, the entire battalion was totally lost. [38]

Just prior to the start of POWERHOUSE I, the 16th Division was pulled out and moved to the south to support the now critical situation at BELFORT due to Hitler's order to hold the terrain. The 716th Volks Grenadier Division assumed control of the sector. Thus, the American 3rd Infantry Division was to face two Volks Grenadier Divisions, the 708th and 716th. Though the 716th was a veteran unit, the shortcomings of both were similar, and a review of these two units aptly paints the gloomy picture of German capability in the early winter of 1944. These units were a stripped down version of a division where every economy in equipment had been made. As a result, the divisions were handicapped in swift movement. They were mainly foot units so it was essentially impossible to have a mobile reserve or make a deep reconnaissance. The main elements of transportation were bicycles and horses. At best, the division's infantry companies could muster 60 men for an attack. Within a day of the MEURTHE RIVER crossing, some companies would be

encountered with less than 10 men. Each division had started with 6 guns for its division artillery, with the 75mm the most favored. The assault gun battalion was essentially the mobile anti-tank reserve of the division. Unfortunately, the 708th was to lose its gun battalion at the outset of fighting on the MEURTHE. Austerity also affected the engineer structure. Only two engineer companies existed in the division structure thereby limiting their assignment to the main point of attack.

As already mentioned, the 708th Division, soon to be totally decimated in the rapid advance after the MEURTHE crossing, was thrust into the line replacing the 21st Panzer and was totally unprepared for combat. The 716th, by virtue of its longevity in battle, fared only slightly better. The 708th command structure of two regimental and six battalion staffs was essentially manned by captains who had never led battalions. The other officers varied in age and war experience but most were relatively old. They arrived irregularly at the front, and as a result were fed piecemeal into their units. The NCO corps was entirely wanting, made up of 70% flying sergeants and Navy personnel completely unfamiliar with Army weapons and procedures. Further, the rapid commitment of the Division and piecemeal staffing of units precluded any effective training. [39] The soldiers were comprised of all age classes but were mostly very young

men with absolutely no experience and essentially no training, or older men, combed from factories and other working staffs and more or less consisting of convalescent wounded. Personnel for artillery and engineer units arrived particularly late as the Division formed. Further, the soldiers arriving for the different arms came with virtually no soldier skill expertise and the Division had no training sergeants to overcome the problem.

What training that did take place only highlighted the Division's difficulty. Infantry soldiers trained on a new machine gun with which everyone in the Division was totally unfamiliar. Artillery and tank forces had to be trained in systems partly unknown even by the trainers, and the bulk of the weapons arrived only two weeks before the Division went into combat. The assault gun battalion was seen by the Division Commander only after it had already been committed in battle. [40]

Supplies into the Volks Grenadier Divisions were equally deficient. Supplies arrived sporadically and were wanting at critical times. Devices for laying artillery arrived the day of commitment, as did tool boxes for maintenance of crew served weapons. Only 70% of signal sets were on hand, and none of those on hand were complete. [40]

The 708th and 716th Divisions were equipped with horse drawn vehicles except for self-propelled anti-tank guns and a very few motor vehicles. Unfortunately, Division staffs had to procure these horses from the countryside. Much of the Division's organizational and sustainment effort went to obtaining the horses, and those they got were unaccustomed to pulling heavy loads, afraid of motor vehicles and the sounds of war, and had not worked as teams. [42] Training again was insufficient. The few motor vehicles were insignificant in view of the sheer mass of men and material the Division was required to move in combat conditions. Under the awful winter weather tactical movements of the Divisions at times approached a full route of the unit.

Thus, in almost every aspect, the German forces facing the 3rd Infantry Division confirmed their incompleteness of training, their lack of manpower and equipment, and desperate tactical situation. Manpower, skills, equipment and maintainability in infantry, artillery, engineer, signal and ordnance materials was insufficient to mount and conduct winter combat operations. The Divisions, particularly the newly formed 708th Volks Grenadier, entered battle unprepared for what it was to face, and as a result, suffered heavy casualties and became all too quickly battle weary and exhausted. The terrain of VOSGES, while forming a

defensive barrier of itself, also contributed to the breakup and exhaustion of the German defenders. When the VI (US) Corps and 3rd Infantry Division kicked off their attack, it was only stubborn courage and fantastic human efforts that held together the German line for as long as it did. When exhaustion and the force of numbers and quality of equipment could be felt, the retreat of the Nineteenth Army was complete and not to be stopped until the RHINE RIVER.

MILITARY OBJECTIVES AND COURSES OF ACTIONS

Clearly, the Germans in the VOSGES in late November 1944 were a force inferior in both number and arms and insufficiently supported. At best they hoped for success in defensive warfare. The VOSGES offered favorable terrain for this; however, the LXIV Corps Commander, General Helmut Thumin, felt "...the greater the disadvantage is numerically, tactically, and insofar as weapons and ammunition ... concerned, the less wise it is to maintain a rigid and continuous defense." [43]

Thus, the Germans were forced to establish not a main combat or defense line, but a security line. Thus the forward positions which the 3rd Infantry Division was to initially meet in the MEURTHE crossing were only lightly manned. Since

reserves were unavailable throughout the operation, units had to conduct their limited counterattacks from within their own resources. But the American superiority was just too crushing. The Germans were constantly forced to withdraw, but they did so always fighting. Though seen as a complete American victory, the defense of the MEURTHE RIVER must also be seen in the light of superhuman German efforts.

Initially the Germans thought the winter of 1944/1945 might be the time the enemy could be stopped in the VOSGES, but alone, without reinforcements, the weak German forces on the front could not resist the far superior American forces. As a result, the A-GP-G was forced to either make a counterattack which would have to be supported with armor and air cover, or absorb the dislodged units on a deeper defense line. As they had no reserves, the forces of Nineteenth Army were forced to adopt delaying tactics, and in the case of the MEURTHE RIVER crossing operation, were forced into wholesale retreat. The impact of this operation is clearly seen in Map 4, the situation of A-GP-G on 28 November.

3-59

MS 9-078 APP 5

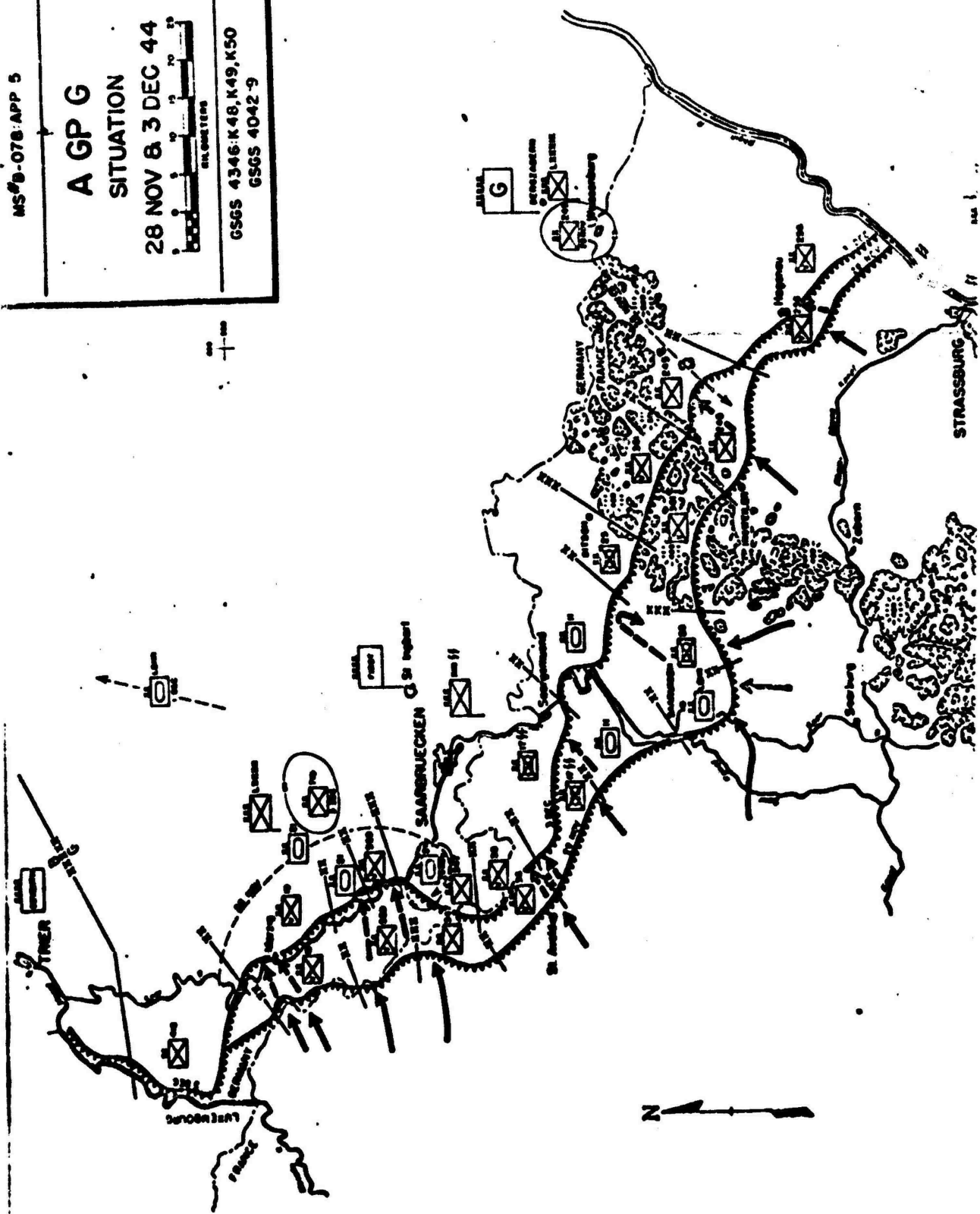
A GP G

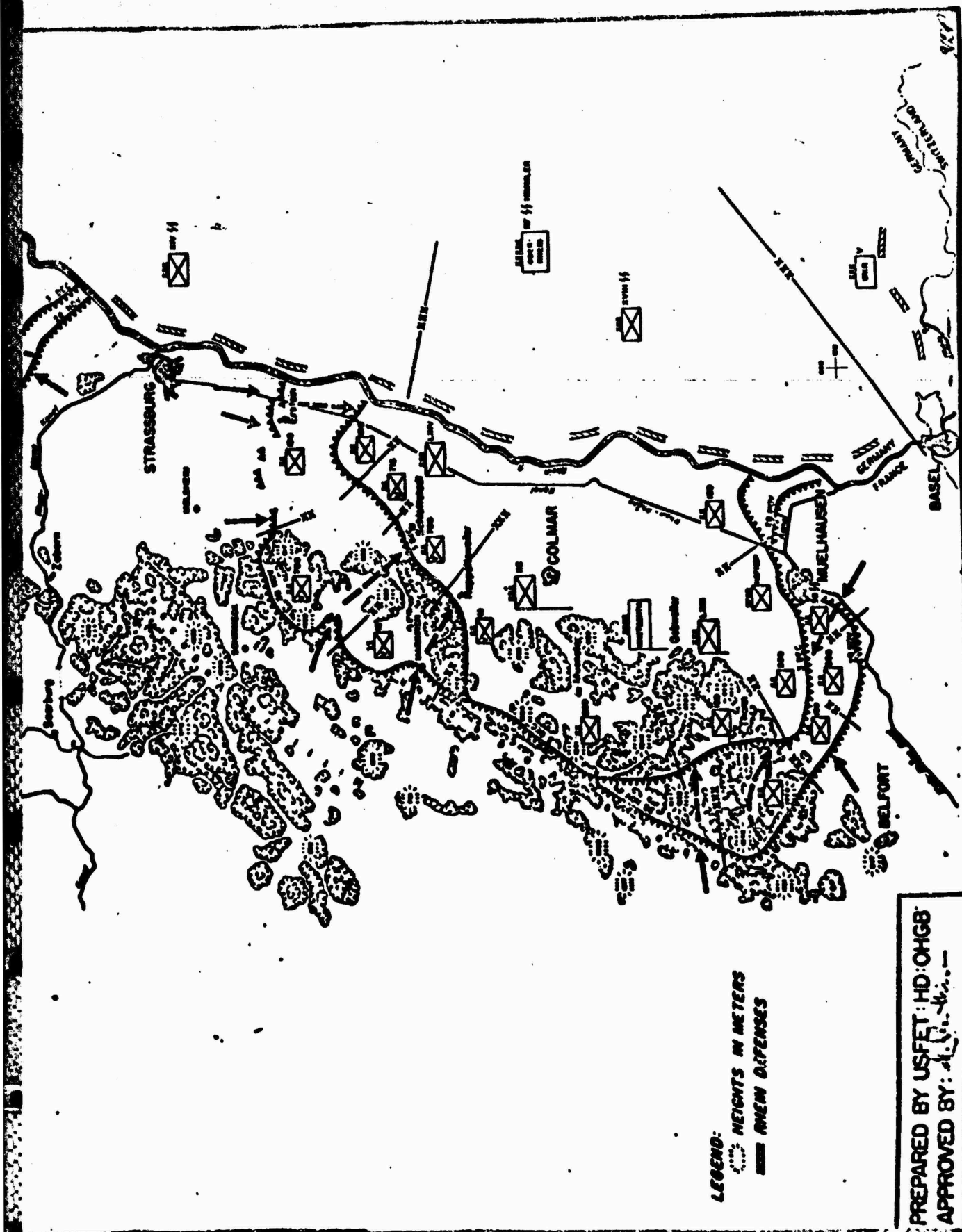
SITUATION

28 NOV & 3 DEC 44



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On the American side, October and early November were used for preparation for future action. The Seventh Army used the period to regroup and resupply for more decisive battles to come. The Seventh Army attacks in the western VOSGES during these weeks deprived the enemy of his forward defensive positions and pushed him back to his main line of resistance even before the opening of the November offensive. The staff of the Seventh Army in EPINAL planned and gave orders for the execution of the combined maneuver to take STRASBOURG on the RHINE. As VI Corps prepared to press through the VOSGES, the XV Corps was already pointing the weight of its forces toward the SAVERNE GAP.

The Seventh Army directive of 5 November opened the November offensive. The mission of the Seventh Army was "...attack on D-Day, destroy the enemy in zone west of the RHINE, capture STRASBOURG and maintain contact with the right flank of the Twelfth Army Group." [44] We have addressed the options faced by VI Corps and the preparation of 3rd Infantry Division to lead the assault. Let us now look at the battle.

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- 5 Ibid., p. 8.
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- 13 "Seventh Army in the Vosges." Battalion and Small Unit Study No. 4, The Seventh Army Regiment, p. 19, n.d.

- 14 The Seventh United States Army Report of Operations, France and Germany, 1944-1945, Vol II, (Heidelberg: Aloys Graf, 1946), p. 274.
- 15 Report, p. 29.
- 16 Ibid., p. 23.
- 17 Ibid., p. 34.
- 18 Ibid., p. 38.
- 19 Ibid., p. 25.
- 20 Battle, p. 8.
- 21 Ibid., p. 7.
- 22 Report, p. 183.
- 23 Ibid., p. 183.
- 24 Ibid., p. 184.
- 25 Battle, p. 7.
- 26 Report, p. 31.
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- 28 Ibid., p. 32.
- 29 The Seventh US Army, p. 275.

- 30 Battle, p. 9.
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- 32 FM 5-6, Operations of Engineer Field Units, US Army,
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- 33 Report, p. 39.
- 34 Army Group G, Report of the Chief of Staff, 20 Sep-3 Dec
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- 35 Friedrick Wiese, The 19th Army in the Belfort Gap, in the
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- 37 Ernst Haekel, 16th Infantry Division: Operation of the
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- 38 Ibid., p. 6.
- 39 Josef P. Krieger, 708th Volks Grenadier Division: Operation
of the 708th V.G. Division, 15 Sep - 17 Nov 1944, p. 3, n.d.
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from 1 Nov - 31 Dec 1944, p. 3, n.d.

44 The Seventh US Army, p. 255.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

The American Seventh Army had been pushing the Germans from successive positions in the VOSGES MOUNTAINS since the 21st of September. The German command made one more attempt to halt the Allied advance and establish a "winter line" to deny easy access to the industrial west bank of the RHINE RIVER. East of the MEURTHE RIVER were the last ridges of the VOSGES MOUNTAINS and the last defensible terrain before the mountain group slopes off into the RHINE VALLEY.[1] The German MEURTHE RIVER line, a system of trenches generally following the east bank of the river, was established to deny the Seventh Army easy access to the industrial center of the RHINE VALLEY. There were numerous machinegun positions and occasional anti-tank, heavy and light anti-aircraft and self-propelled gun positions. The main line of defense along the crest of the VOSGES was fortifications at the passes to provide protection to important installations or to delay a general advance.[2]

Facing the German defense line in positions on the opposite bank of the MEURTHE RIVER were three American divisions: the 100th at RADON-L'ETAPE; the 3rd, occupying the MEURTHE PLAIN around NOMPATELIZE; and the 103rd Division overlooking ST. DIE from high ground east of TAINTRUX.[3] The

general American plan of attack was to make a frontal assault across the river by the 100th and the 3rd Divisions after which the 103rd would cross behind the 3rd and turn south to attack ST. DIE.[4] [MAP 5]

The 100th Division was to attack up the valley between the FORET DES RECLOS, the FORET DOMANIALE DES CELLES to RAON-LES-LEAU and then to SCHIRMECK. The 3rd Division was to attack across the mountain ridge on a three to four mile wide front from MOYENMOUTIER and LA VOIVRE to SAULXURES and SOALES. The major crossing operation was a one battalion operation and therefore the main emphasis would be on this battalion.[5]

Operations Instructions No. 9 issued on 19 November indicated H-hour as 0645 hours on 20 November. Prior to H-hour and under the cover of darkness, the 7th and 30th Regiments of the 3rd Division successfully crossed the MEURTHE between CLAIREFONTAINE and ST MICHEL.[6] The 30th Infantry had the sector north of the LA HOLLANDE-HURBACHE ROAD and the 7th Infantry attacked south of the road. The 7th Infantry attacked with two battalions abreast and the 3rd Battalion in reserve. [MAP 6] The northernmost battalion, the 1st Battalion, had an enemy entrenchment just south of LA HOLLANDE ROAD about 1000 yards from the river as its objective (Obj X). The 2nd Battalion was to take the town of LA VOIVRE (Obj Y) and a bridge site 600 yards south of town (Obj Z).[7]

The best bridges in the area were opposite and just south of LA VOIVRE. Although those bridges were blown by the retreating Germans, the sites still provided the best places to erect assault bridges over which to pass the Division's armor and supplies as well as the follow-on attack of the 103rd Division in its flanking attack on ST. DIE.[8]

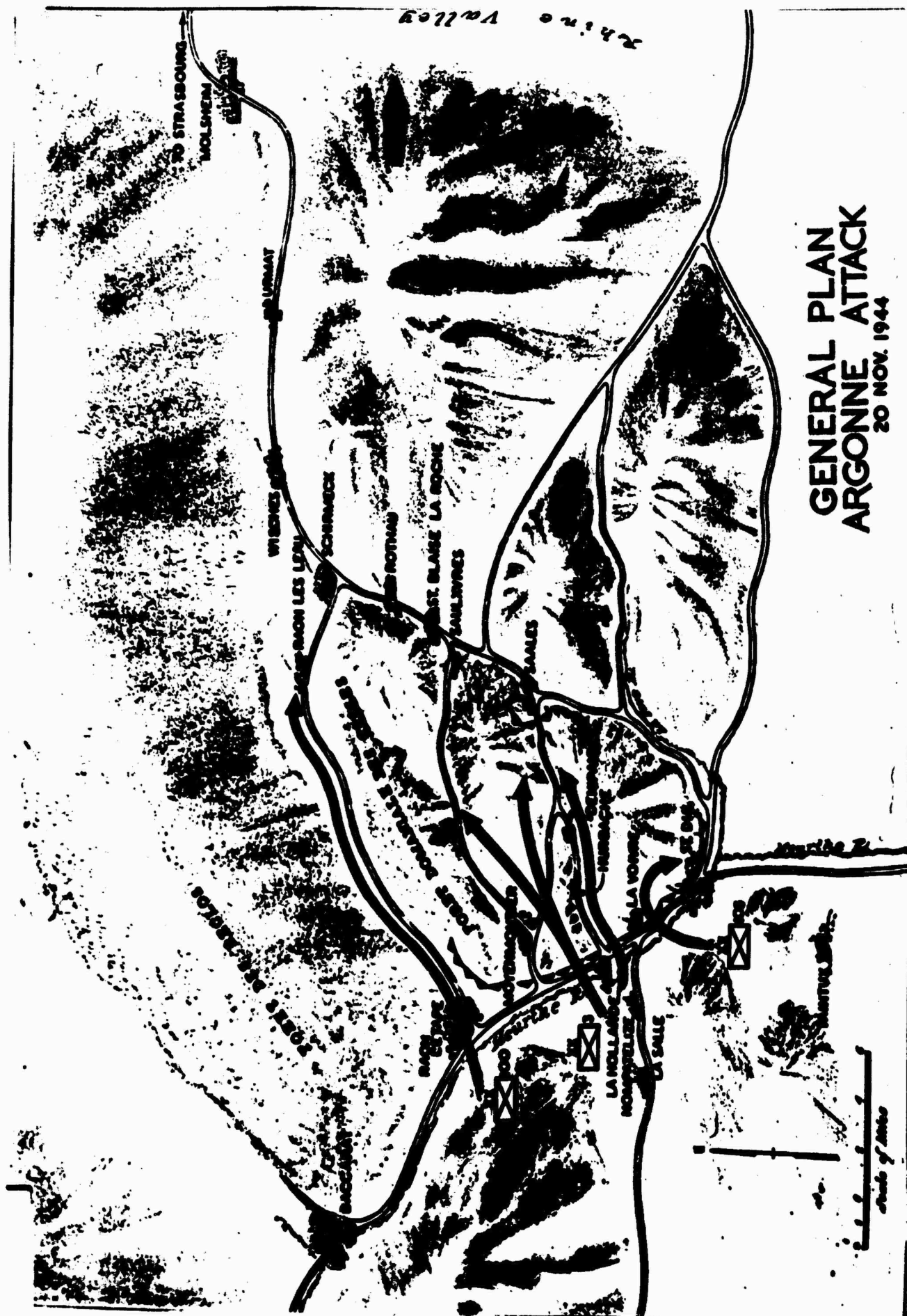
The vicinity of LA VOIVRE was of great tactical importance and was defended accordingly. The defenses were manned by the 7th Company, 726th Regiment supported by mortars and machineguns of the 8th Company, 726th Regiment. They consisted of elaborate entrenchments and house-to-house fortifications supported by mortars and artillery, screened by minefields and the natural barrier of the MEURTHE RIVER. All along the east bank of the river were hills and ridges which offered excellent positions and fields of fire. The town of LA VOIVRE was the main focal point of defense. The area between the town and the river was strewn with anti-personnel mines and carefully dug trenches. Behind these, the houses of LA VOIVRE were turned into a fortified line with interconnecting tunnels and breached walls. Houses on the town's two intersections were strong pointed and many of the cellars "bomb proofed". In addition to these defenses, several trench lines were dug into the hills behind the north end of town to enfilade to other positions.[9]

The place selected for the crossing was opposite the north end of LA VOIVRE where the river swings toward the west. This appeared to be the least defended area. The attack began early the night of the 19th of November with the crossing of the river by the two security platoons of the lead battalions in wooden assault boats to secure the far bank. They moved approximately 300 yards in from the river bank to the "Line of Departure" and established a security watch while the engineers built two foot-bridges over which the battalions were to cross. These were standard wooden floatable bridges with a three-foot wide gangway and attached cables for hand guides. The two bridges were completed without interference from the enemy.[10]

While the engineers were building the bridges, the direct-fire support units were taking their positions along the railroad line toward ST. MICHEL. These units were composed of tanks, tank destroyers, flak wagons, machine gunners, chemical mortarmen and anti-tank gunners. By the time the direct-fire weapons were in position the 2nd Battalion was enroute from its assembly area around FREMEFONTAINE. [MAP 7] One and one-half hours later they detrucked at LA SALLE and began the march on foot along selected routes to bridge No. 1. The 2nd Battalion's movement went smoothly, and by 0220 hours the lead elements were at the river crossing. Receiving only

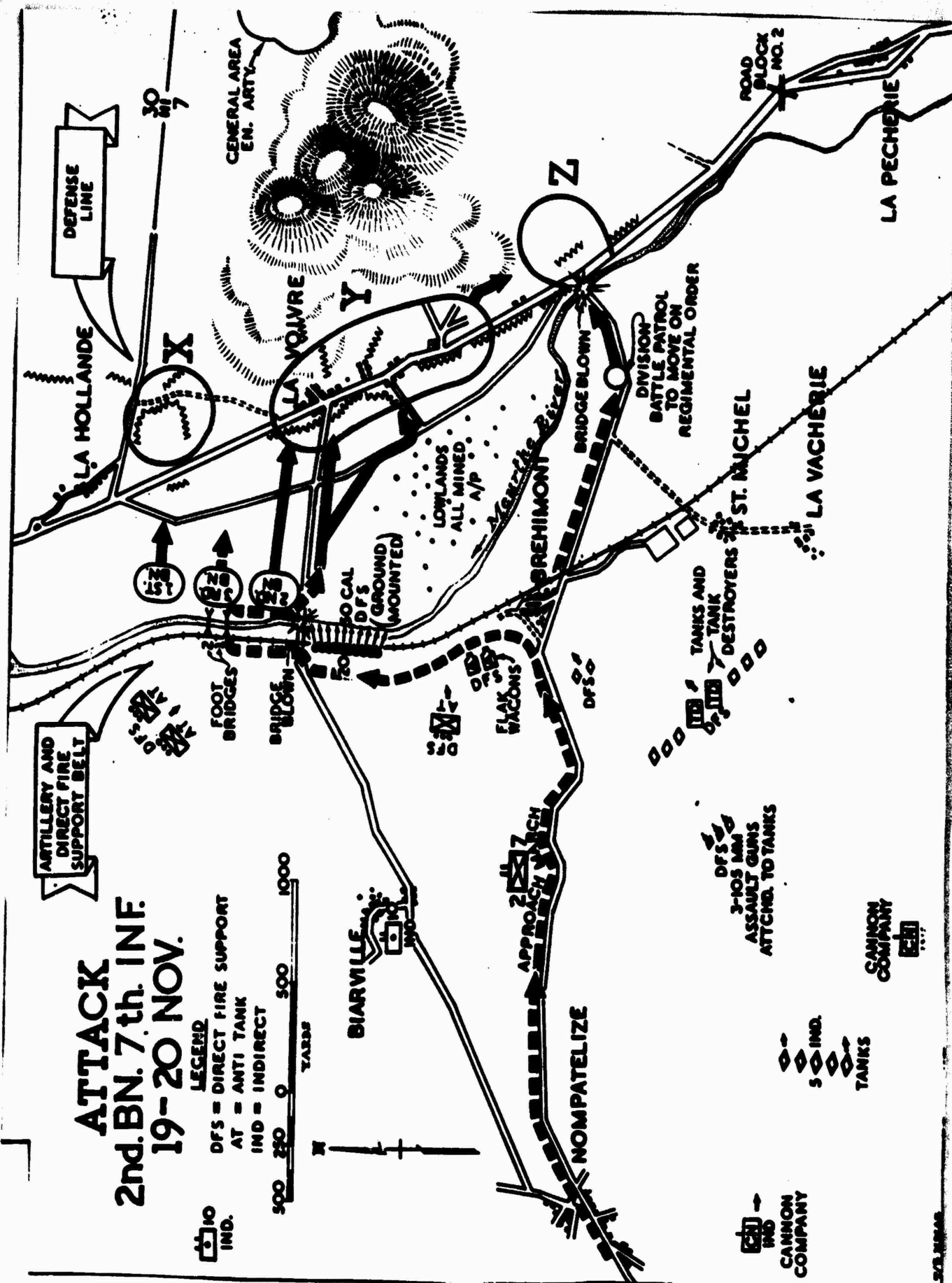
harrassing fire from the enemy artillery, the battalion started the river crossing at 0345 hours and moved approximately 300 yards into the fields along the NOMPATELIZE ROAD to the "Line of Departure", joining its security platoon. The battalion deployed with two companies on line; Company F in the north, Company E south of the BIARVILLE ROAD; and Company G in the rear in column of platoons facing south. [MAP 8] The first battalion also crossed the river with no problem and took up positions to the north of the 2nd Battalion. The 3rd Battalion, however, did not complete its movement in time and part was on the west bank and part on the east bank when the artillery preparation started.[11]

MAP 5



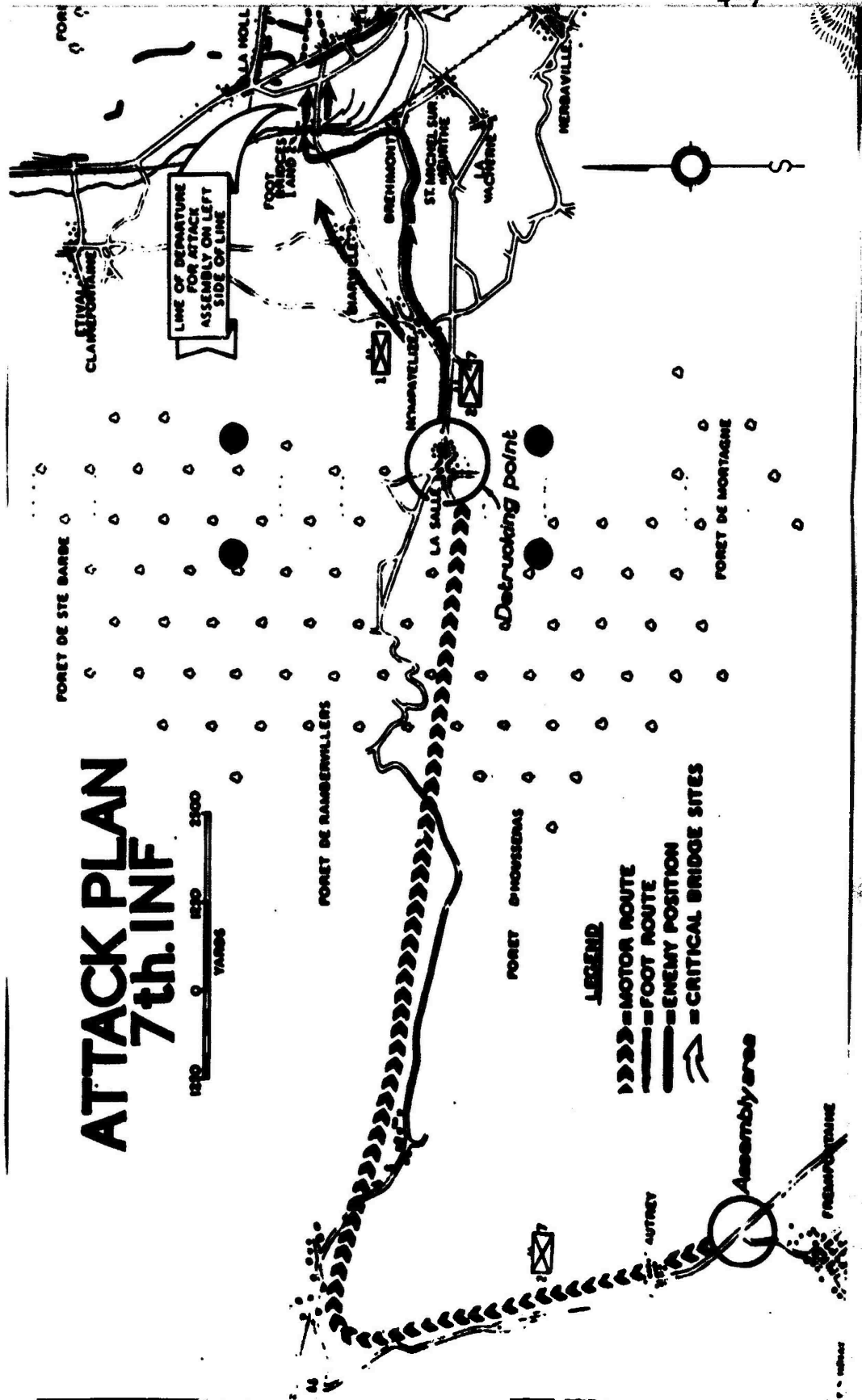
ATTACK **2nd BN. 7th INF.** **19-20 NOV.**

LEGEND
 DFS = DIRECT FIRE SUPPORT
 AT = ANTI TANK
 IND = INDIRECT



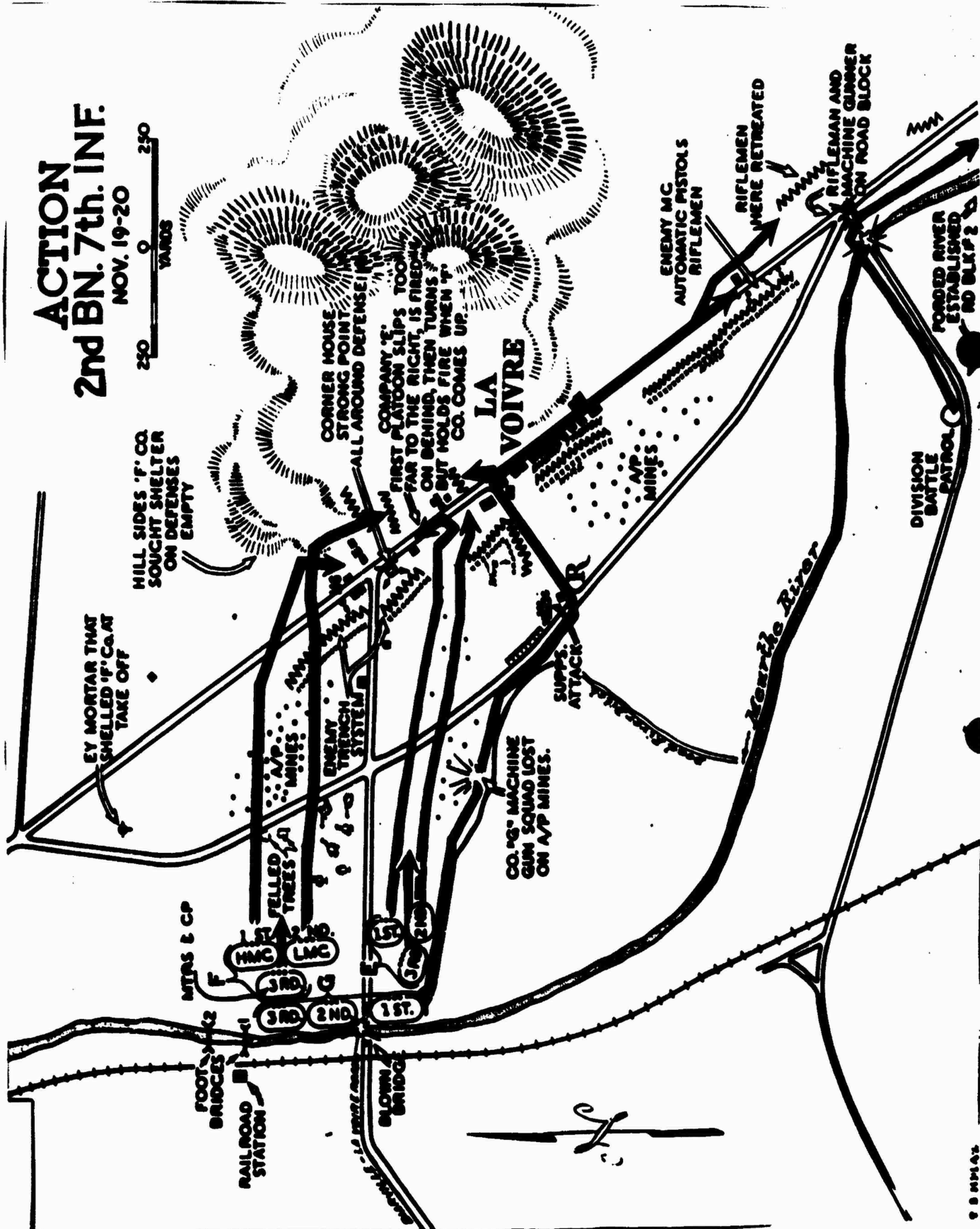
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4-9



ACTION 2nd BN. 7th. INF. NOV. 19-20

250 0 250
YARDS



The artillery preparation began at 0617 hours. Three field artillery battalions plus a heavy AAA unit laid down approximately 1500 rounds on the German line within 27 minutes. The concentration fell along the entire line from LA HOLLANDE south through LA VOIVRE and the bridge south of LA VOIVRE. The fires on LA VOIVRE were directed at the buildings along the road junctions and behind the town upon the most dangerous hill slopes.[12]

The artillery preparation alerted the Germans to the impending attack, and they fired a counter barrage of mortar fire aimed at the river line expecting to catch a battalion crossing at the time. They hit a position of the 3rd Battalion and caused limited casualties.

The advance of Companies F and E along both sides of NOMPATELIZE ROAD was supposed to be simultaneous and mutually supporting, but the Germans had felled a number of trees along F Company's path and significantly slowed them. Company E met no such obstacle and advanced into town in 15 minutes.

The delay of Company F gave the Germans time to get out of the cellars after the preparation and take up their machinegun positions and deliver effective fire on Company F; however, under the cover of its own heavy weapons, Company F

worked its way across the fields and empty enemy trenches to the north edge of town. Fortunately, many of the prepared German positions were not occupied. A corner house was strong pointed. Although it had been hit during the barrage and was burning, its defenders fought the position well. They gave Company F a strong fire fight for 15 minutes before they deserted their positions.[13]

Company E had a much easier time. It faced little in the way of prepared obstacles, and at first there was little resistance. The leading platoon got through the bands of wire and mines and ran across the trenches into the town without much difficulty. The Germans abandoned good defensive positions in front of Company E probably because of the direct-fire support which they were getting over the heads of Company E. They began house-to-house clean-up operations and generally found the Germans huddled in the basements and ready to surrender.[14]

Company G's attack on LA VOIVRE was more complicated because of their initial disposition in a column of platoons. It was to move along the old river bed of the MEURTHE RIVER to the ST.DIE highway, then along it to a road that ran into town. The company ran into the anti-personnel mines along the river bed and lost the entire machinegun squad from the heavy weapons company. Plans were revised based on the loss of the

machineguns, and Company G made a rapid advance into the city. The enemy offered virtually no resistance, and Company G moved rapidly to clear the houses along its route. The direct-fire support given to Company G was declared "damn good close support" and facilitated the rapid advance of Company G.[15]

While F and E Companies completed the mop-up and reorganization in the town, Company G turned south to seize the bridge objective by a flanking attack. The position was manned by a squad and was quickly overrun. Additional defenders supporting the position fled into the hills and directed mortar and artillery fire onto the bridge causing some casualties in Company G. The Division Battle Patrol was at this time ordered to pass thru G Company and set up a road block approximately 800 meters south of the bridge. Companies E and F had finished cleaning up the town and had moved to occupy the hills bordering on the objective with Company E on the right and Company F on the left. Company G held its position 800 meters south of the bridge.[16]

Although mines and artillery continued to harass troops and movement in the area, the battle was essentially over. The engineers were busy building bridges, and the armor waited. The 3rd Battalion had been committed between the 1st and 2nd Battalions. Division notified the 7th Infantry that

the main attack would be shifted towards DENIPAIRE and that the 7th should hold its position on the right flank. The next day the 103rd Division passed through and attacked ST.DIE. The entire operation took approximately four hours and cost 68 casualties including 11 killed in action. The U.S. forces took 45 prisoners and overran an elaborately planned defense line.[17]

Key Events/Outcome

The MEURTHE RIVER crossing, from the perspective of "key events", can best be described as an operation which has no one significant turning point but rather consists of a series of limited U.S. successes which collectively led to the accomplishment of the crossing.

The decision by Seventh U.S. Army for the 3rd Division to cross the river quietly on the night of 19-20 November, thus achieving a degree of tactical surprise, constituted what was probably the chief reason for the eventual U.S. success. First, the division engineers were able to install two foot-bridges across the river, undetected by the Germans, by 2130 hours 19 November.[18] This was made possible by three factors:

- (1) The choice of a night crossing rather than a day crossing,

(2) The deliberate avoidance of an artillery preparation in conjunction with the engineer effort, and

(3) Most importantly, by a complete failure on the part of the Germans to station listening posts/observation posts close enough on their (east) side of the MEURTHE RIVER to detect any crossing attempts by U.S. units. Had the Germans detected the engineer work or the subsequent crossing of the combat units, their responding artillery fires on U.S. troops in the open would have seriously jeopardized the entire mission. This early decision on the part of Seventh Army to conduct a night crossing unsupported initially by artillery was the most important aspect of the operation. As a result, the 1st, 2nd, and eventually 3rd Battalions of the 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Division, were able to cross the MEURTHE largely undetected.

The majority of fighting to secure positions on the east bank of the MEURTHE consisted of a series of small unit fire fights, most of which cannot be characterized in isolation as particularly significant. The 7th Infantry was able to push across its 1st and 2nd Battalions undetected by 0430 hours on 20 November, with the 3rd Battalion crossing during the artillery preparation, after elements of 7th Infantry had made contact.[19] From available accounts, it

appears the decisive fighting, if not the majority of the fighting, was done by 2nd Battalion. During the fight for the city of LA VOIVRE, two small unit incidents which had the potential to affect greatly the final outcome of the battle are worth analyzing.

First, Company F was to advance alongside Company E, 2nd Battalion, following the general axis of the NOMPATELIZE ROAD, and attack and destroy in zone enemy soldiers in dug-in positions and defensive positions in buildings vicinity LA VOIVRE. The German commanders had anticipated this axis of advance and had constructed a formidable abatis of fallen trees in the woods adjacent to the road. Consequently, Company F lost the element of surprise in the attack, and the enemy had time to man their positions while the U.S. soldiers made their way through this obstacle, falling behind Company E in the attack. This slowed Company F by half-an-hour in the coordinated attack and subjected its men to some effective machinegun fire, causing the overall Division mission to be delayed. Here is an example of a "key" event being precipitated by the German commander anticipating the flow of the battle and making good use of obstacles to increase his chances of success.

As the fighting moved into the scattered buildings of

LA VOIVRE, a platoon of Company E by-passed an occupied enemy strong point in a corner house. This error could have had dire consequences for the company, if not other elements of the battalion, were it not for the quick response of the U.S. soldiers. The platoon, on receiving unexpected fire from the house (by this time to its rear), immediately sought cover and returned effective suppressive fire. As the platoon joined other company units, and assisted by elements of Company F, it was eventually able to neutralize the position. Here is a "key" event caused by inexperienced soldiers and leaders but stopped short of German success by the U.S. soldiers' fighting spirit and the failure of the Germans to capitalize on the situation.

Company G, in its progress to clear the southern part of the city, encountered a large field of anti-personnel mines which inflicted a number of casualties, to include an entire squad of the Heavy Weapons Company. This slowed the company's movement. Furthermore, the loss of the machineguns from the Heavy Weapons Company meant that Company G could now not carry out its mission as it was originally conceived. The company commander immediately gave a fragmentary order to the 1st and 2nd platoons, altering their mission to one of support for the 2nd platoon and of continuing the attack for 1st platoon. All this was done as casualties were being treated and evacuated,

and small units were being reorganized to continue the fight. From this point the 1st platoon, meeting little German resistance, was able to move quickly into town. Company G later conducted a turning movement and secured Objective Z, completing the successful bridgehead for the battalion and 3rd Division. The actions of the Company G Commander are important in this "key" event of the crossing of the MEURTHE RIVER. His quick actions underscore the importance of decisiveness on the battlefield and undoubtedly did much to maintain the momentum of the attack. More importantly, however, the Germans failed from a tactical standpoint. A cardinal rule of obstacles is that they are most effective only when covered by fire; this was not done.[20] There can be little doubt that Company G, caught in an open field of anti-personnel mines as they were, would have been seriously reduced if taken under fire at this time by German artillery and/or machineguns. Since the continued momentum of the Company G attack was so instrumental in the final accomplishment of the division mission, this was a critical failure on the part of the Germans.

U.S. forces of the 3rd Infantry Division achieved a clear-cut tactical victory in the crossing of the MEURTHE RIVER on 20 November. Contributing factors to this victory were U.S. initiative, both in planning and in reacting to the

tactical situation, and the repeated failure of the Germans to employ sound tactical measures or to exploit success; however, one must remember that the Germans were fighting greatly outnumbered. Post-battle estimates put the German forces defending LA VOIVRE at one to two infantry companies. The German 716th Infantry Division had no reserves and were somewhat demoralized from previous losses. Subsequent interviews with German prisoners of war revealed that many of the soldiers had resigned themselves to being overcome in the river crossing that they knew would happen.[21] The soldiers of the 3rd Division involved in the river crossing agreed almost to a man that if the positions opposite them had been fully manned in this engagement, the U.S. casualties would have been much greater.[22]

ENDNOTES

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3. Seventh Army in the Vosges, p. 1.
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13. Ibid., p. 14.
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15. Ibid., pp. 18-20.
16. Ibid., p. 22.
17. Ibid., pp. 22-23.
18. Seventh Army in the Vosges, p. 10.
19. Ibid., p. 12.
20. Ibid., pp. 18-22.
21. The Seventh Army Report of Operations, p. 430.
22. Seventh Army in the Vosges, p. 23.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ACTION

The MEURTHE RIVER crossing was a decisive, though minor, victory for the Allied Forces. Three basic factors primarily influenced the decisive outcome of the battle. First, the German defenses in the sector were relatively weak and lacked both armor and effective reserves. Second, the US VI Corps made extensive and detailed preparation for the battle. Finally, the river crossing (and subsequent actions) was rapidly and violently executed.

The significance of the MEURTHE RIVER crossing must be assessed from the perspective of the general situation facing the German Army in the VOSGES MOUNTAINS. As map 9 shows, German Army Group G (First and Nineteenth Armies) was under heavy pressure in the north (in the SAVERNE PASS by the US XV Corps) and in the south (primarily in the BELFORT GAP by the First French Army). The Army Group G report for this period shows that the Group Commander placed his primary emphasis upon the defense of these approaches by economizing in the center of his broad sector. Consequently, the German LXIV Corps, defending the MEURTHE RIVER line in front of the US VI Corps, was severely weakened, and by 20 November, in danger of encirclement. In addition, as mentioned earlier, this battle

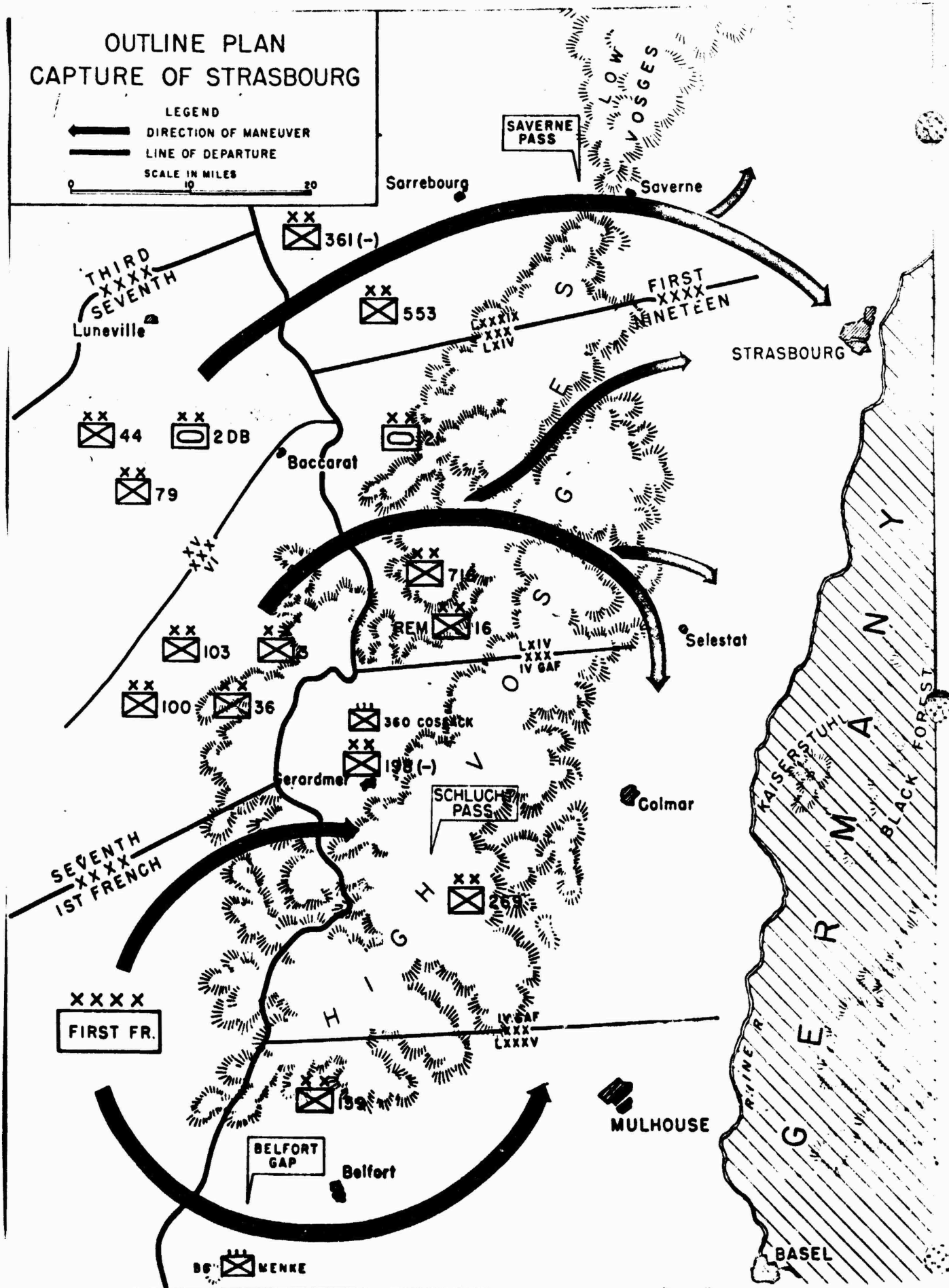
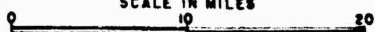
OUTLINE PLAN CAPTURE OF STRASBOURG

LEGEND

DIRECTION OF MANEUVER

LINE OF DEPARTURE

SCALE IN MILES



MAP 9

and every other action in the region was heavily influenced by the German preparations for the impending Ardennes Offensive. This preparation stripped Army Group G of reserves and armor forces which otherwise would have been available to stiffen defensive positions in the VOSGES MOUNTAINS.[1]

The US VI Corps prepared thoroughly for both the river crossing and the subsequent offensive thrust towards STRASBOURG. West of the MEURTHE, the Corps stockpiled sufficient ammunition of all types in forward ASPs to conduct a 14-day offensive. In particular, 76mm ammunition was stored in such quantity that 17 M4A3 tanks (with 76mm guns) could be allotted to each tank battalion. This was the first use of this weapon system in VI Corps and resulted in considerably improved firepower in the armor units.[2] In addition to logistical preparations, detailed combined arms training and rehearsals as well as a short rest for the attacking regiments contributed significantly to the decisive success of the battle.

Bold execution of the river crossing operation ensured the conclusive result. The attacking regiments enjoyed complete tactical surprise (having taken advantage of the German decision not to defend on the river banks), crossing the MEURTHE under cover of darkness. This surprise, coupled with extensive direct and indirect fire support and close air

support, rapidly crushed the light German resistance. Previously developed methods of coordinated arms operations worked well in the execution of "Powerhouse I" and contributed to the decisive outcome. These included: engineer-infantry rehearsals, the use of tanks, tank destroyers and flak wagons in direct support from the west bank of the river, and "bumblebee" air support. Effective use of smoke also contributed to the ability of the engineers to erect heavy bridging rapidly enabling combat elements of three divisions to pour across the MEURTHE by 21 November.[3]

The successful forcing of the MEURTHE RIVER had several immediate, although limited, effects upon the war. First, the heavy and rapid assault, strengthened by tactical surprise, caught the Germans unprepared. ST. DIE and key roads crossing the central VOSGES were seized with much less difficulty than was anticipated. The totally successful river crossing precipitated the formation of Task Force Whirlwind (jump-off 22 Nov) to press a determined assault through the VOSGES. The pressure brought to bear by the continuous operations following the river crossing forced German withdrawals to become disorganized and ineffective. Coordinated German defenses crumbled as pockets of resistance were quickly bypassed. US forces took hundreds of prisoners as partially completed defensive positions were overrun. The smooth

success of the MEURTHE RIVER Crossing was the catalyst to the rapid advance to and through the central VOSGES; by 26 November the 15th Infantry regiment seized MOLSHEIM, the last obstacle to debouchment from the VOSGES; by 27 November the VI Corps reached the RHINE.

The US VI Corps all but perfected the conduct of a river crossing operation in this battle; however, the action did result in one immediate staff change. A Movements, Planning and Control Section was formed under the supervision of the AC of S, G-3 for the purpose of ensuring detailed traffic control planning in future river crossing operations.[4]

The MEURTHE RIVER crossing did play a small, but key role in helping the Allies to achieve the important strategic objective of reaching the German border at the RHINE. As noted above, "Powerhouse I" kicked-off the thrust by the US VI Corps which pushed the German LXIV Corps back to STRASBOURG and up against the German border. In the process, the Allies drove a wedge into German Army Group G, splitting it into two groups west of the RHINE: the 19th Army in the Colmar Pocket to the south and the 1st Army in northern ALSACE.[5] This unexpectedly swift action was noteworthy for several reasons. First, the Allies destroyed the planned German winter defense line in the VOSGES. Second, a severe moral blow was dealt to

the Germans as Allied Forces reached German borders much earlier than expected. Third, lateral lines of communication were broken for the German Army west of the RHINE - never to be regained. Fourth, American casualties were much lighter than they would have been had the Germans been given either the time to complete their VOSGES defenses, or the time to reinforce the LXIV Corps sector. Conversely, German losses in both men and material were out of proportion to the short period of time (about a week) bought by the defense. Fifth, the rapid success of the US VI Corps enabled elements of the Corps to consolidate the capture of STRASBOURG before an effective counterattack could be launched. The consolidation then led to a quick relief of the French 2nd Armored Division (which had been first into STRASBOURG) so that it could continue the attack to the south against the Colmar Pocket.[6]

In general, then, "Powerhouse I" was a catalyst to subsequent operations which cleared the weakest, though not insignificant, portion of the last major German defense line west of the RHINE. As such, the battle did not, of itself, place the German Army in a position from which it could not recover. Other, far larger and more critical actions were affecting the war as the VI Corps crossed the MEURTHE. However, this battle did do its small part to affect the long-term objectives of both the Allied and German Armies by

helping to push the Germans out of France and shorten the war while conserving the lives of US soldiers despite formidable terrain and poor weather. Certainly, the MEURTHE RIVER Crossing did not determine the outcome of the war. It was a remarkably successful corps operation of perhaps no less nor greater importance than hundreds of others conducted during World War II.

Lessons Learned

The initial impression of the VI Corps operational success, in particular that of the 3rd Infantry Division, in the MEURTHE RIVER crossing is that it was not necessarily abundant with lessons to be learned. Indeed, the reader may easily surmise that what occurred was a simple verification of Clausewitz's maxim that "when all else is equal numbers prevail".[7] A closer analysis reveals that this complex operation was later determined to be one of the most successful river crossings of the war and in fact, does present some significant military lessons.

Perhaps the most striking lesson one can take from a study of this operation involves the detailed, coordinated staff planning which occurred within the Corps' operational headquarters. The planning for this operation evolved from a

close association of staff agencies. Exaggerated staff cooperation existed horizontally and vertically throughout the Corps. The close exchange of ideas and views resulted in the staff sections being intimately tied together and thus focused all efforts in support of the commander's scheme of maneuver. This remarkable staff work was aided by an equally thorough ground reconnaissance by the corps and division commanders. The personal involvement by the commanders not only clearly articulated the requirements of the operation to the staff but more importantly enabled the division commanders to use their initiative without fear of disrupting the overall Corps plan. Confusion in the lower echelon units did occur during the exploitation of the bridgehead but was overcome by the division commanders being able to focus their actions on support of the Corps Commander's concept. This type of command involvement and staff support was evident in both the planning and execution phases of the operation. This unity of effort presents a model for military officers.

The next area from which lessons could be learned is one which reinforced the value of tactical surprise. The uniqueness of this operation stems from the vision of the 3rd Infantry Division Commander. His idea to initiate the assault on the far side of the river bank ensured the establishment of the bridgehead. The enemy never fully recovered from the

confusion brought on by this tactical maneuver. The Germans knew the operation would soon occur and had a fairly accurate idea of where it would take place. Clearly the show of force of the 45th and 36th Divisions was helpful in disguising the actual assault of enemy lines.[8] Interestingly enough, when the artillery preparation began in earnest, and it was clear that the attack was underway, the German response of indirect fire on the opposite shore indicated that the Americans had achieved total surprise. This innovative leadership became contagious and further solidified the American effort.

The preparation which preceeded the 3rd Infantry Division's success was not limited to proper planning. The river crossing technique which the commander chose included the risk of concentrating on a narrow front with few crossing sites. The success of this tactic was due partially to the comprehensive training program which took place prior to the onset of the attack. This example of preparation teaches that the ability to train and rehearse operations in detail enhances the execution of the plan. In this particular case, familiarity bred confidence and success.

Speed was an earmark of this operation. The "Winter Line" which the Germans intended to form in this area was never successfully completed due to the mobility and speed which the VI Corps demonstrated.[9] This occurred due to the

implementation of two tactical maneuvers: the by-pass technique and the night advance.

The by-pass technique evolved within the VI Corps due to its most recent experiences. The type of fighting which prevailed during the advance to the MEURTHE was slow and tedious and would be unsuitable to exploit the bridgehead at the MEURTHE. The Corps Commander's concept centered on agility and speed. Therefore, both division commanders who conducted the initial crossing decided to by-pass pockets of resistance in favor of exploiting success and presenting a threat to the enemy's rear operations. The success of this technique remained in the script of the Corps plans throughout the advance through the VOSGES.[10] Time and time again the enemy's principal route of withdrawal was cut off resulting in the collapse of enemy defenses. As vividly depicted in the 7th Infantry's zone of action near LA VOIVERE, this tactic served to keep the enemy off balance and frustrated his efforts to establish a determined defense in any one particular location. The by-pass technique used in this operation exists today in many army doctrines. The lesson at the MEURTHE in this regard is not merely to by-pass enemy forces but to maneuver in such a manner as to make the by-passed unit's position untenable while continuing to increase the pressure on the entire front. This is difficult to manage

and requires a clear concept and a unified scheme of maneuver.

The pressure of the surprise crossing and the employment of by-passing units was complemented by a final innovative tactic. This tactic added a new twist to the night advance. The technique required the assault regiments to conduct their daylight operation with two battalions while simultaneously resting the third. The daylight regiments would establish an objective line. The rested battalion would then be brought forward, by vehicles if possible, and passed through at this line. The success of this technique was not only attributed to surprise but mobility. This technique which began as the units crossed the MEURTHE was subsequently employed all the way to the RHINE. In the final analysis that one half of the ground captured was done at night.[11]

The military student gains a great deal from analyzing the maneuver tactics which prevailed during the successful crossing of the MEURTHE RIVER by the divisions of the VI Corps. This analysis, however, is incomplete without a detailed look at some of the significant specific techniques, both good and bad, employed by other line type units which took part in the operation.

The artillery preparation which preceded the assault at the MEURTHE was the largest since ANZIO.[12] This preparation

was followed by continuous artillery support throughout the bridgehead assault and subsequent attacks. The success of this artillery was not brought about by an overwhelming number of cannons but by a well defined fire plan engineered at the Corps Artillery Headquarters. The Corps Artillery Commander also conducted endless reconnaissance. This personal involvement coupled with the frequent visits to his Division Artillery Headquarters ensured that the Corps Artillery fire plan was totally coordinated to include the placement of guns. Careful planning and close supervision of the execution of these plans enabled the artillery to provide maximum support for the maneuver forces.

Similar coordination was evident in the engineer effort to support this operation. Close coordination of the corps and division assets resulted in the timely construction of bridges at ST. MICHEL and CLAIREFONTAINE. Timely smoke screens were provided by the Divisional Engineer. The Corps Engineers were not attached to the divisions. This procedure allowed the corps to conduct engineer operations without the concern of boundary constraints. Admittedly the need for corps assets to be attached to divisional units may be prevalent in other operations. The flexibility afforded the Corps Engineer in this battle later helped in forming Engineer doctrine. Opponents of the concept that corps assets should always be

attached to divisional units cited operations similar to the MEURTHE RIVER crossing to state their case.

One of the more prevalent weaknesses of what was an otherwise successful operation centered in a support activity. The traffic control plan implemented in this operation proved to be woefully inadequate. Snarls, backups and excessive troop concentrations plagued the operation and may have been disastrous if the enemy resistance had been stronger. The movement of large forces in difficult terrain requires detailed traffic control. In conjunction with river crossing operations where a pause or slowdown at the crossing site is imminent, traffic control must be a priority topic in the plan. Although this portion of the operation is shrouded by the overall success of the day, a clear lesson for Army planners was readily available.

The successful crossing of the MEURTHE RIVER by the divisions of the VI Corps reinforced many of the doctrines of the day and helped create new ones. The benefits realized by command presence, the clear understanding of the operation by all the key players, sound and comprehensive staff work, and meaningful training were easily identified during this battle.

The innovative tactics, the superb artillery and engineer support, and the problems of traffic control are specific

lessons which were invaluable to the commanders on the scene.
 Their value remains untarnished today.

ENDNOTES

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